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GRASPS OF GUESS

GERALD H. PAULET



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GRASPS OF GUESS

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SOME LETTERS OF A MODERN THINKER

By
GERALD H. PAULET, B.A.

"Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
Which pull the more into the less,
Making the finite comprehend Infinity."
—ROBERT BROWNING.

With a Foreword by
JOHN H. SKRINE, D.D.

LONDON:
SKEFFINGTON & SON, LTD.
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, ST. PAUL'S, E.C.4.

45301320 ✓

To
MY WIFE.

Also
Those other friends who hailed
with such true sympathy the
genesis of these letters—
REV. W. GARRETT HORDER
M. R. B.
M. K. H.

FOREWORD

WHAT is the purpose of a Foreword when it is from another hand than that of the author of the book? It must be, I take it, to do what cannot be done *salva modestia* by the writer of the book—to point out to hesitant readers the use which the book can be to them.

That office I find it not difficult to discharge for the work before me.

We are in a season of theologic disquiet and change. The credal shapes into which the Christian faith was cast sixteen centuries ago are, in certain members of them, challenged as no longer correct reflectors of the beliefs of those who are in these times required or expected to recite them. There is need for the Church to re-study them and judge whether they are to be reaffirmed without change, or pruned by excisions, or amended by modification of language, or reinterpreted with the letter left intact. What is the authority in the Christian Church which can execute such revision or reconstruction?

What was the authority by which a creed was constituted in the fourth century? Who made the formulary which we name after the councils of Nicæa and Constantinople? It is commonly attributed to the 315 bishops whom Constantine caused to assemble in council in 325 A.D. They certainly drafted the formulary and presented it to Christendom. But that it should become

the law of the Church's belief there was needed a condition which it took fifty years of violent contention to secure. That condition was the *Consensus Populi*. The Fathers promulge a creed, the people must weigh and judge, reject or accept it. If that acceptance is attained the creed becomes law.

The event of the early fourth century is in far milder form repeating itself in the early twentieth. The matter of debate is actually the same—the Being of Christ, His place in the world of things. What think ye of Jesus the Man of Nazareth: was He and is He divine? It was the question over which Arius and Athanasius contended. How is the Church to answer it to-day? Who must promulge, who confirm, a decree? Now as then the chief officers of the Church must draft a decision in council, formal or more probably informal, and the body of Churchmen, lay and clerical, must consider it and give or withhold assent.

The usefulness which I expect for this brief book is that it will assist these Churchmen to discharge the office of weighing and valuing the doctrines which the authorities formulate and submit for the acceptance of the Church. This usefulness it will have because in the sequence of these imaginary letters (which, however, are in some part an actual correspondence with friends) the writer is pursuing a study of the questions on which a common judgment is required by a method of most helpfulness to the plain man who has to contribute to that judgment. For in these letters which traverse almost the whole range of beliefs and difficulties of belief, the writer enacts the part of one debater in a dialogue and invites the reader to sustain the other part in the interlocution. A reader who is a 'plain man' is often

too shy to discuss fundamental questions with a live interlocutor, and perhaps has no friend capable of such dialectic. In this book he meets with a helpful comrade who will walk at his side exploring with him the paths of religious thought and some of its mazes with a mind and spirit of equal fellowship.

One remembers from early college days how the scholar who was well placed as to companionship with equals in the same study was advantaged in comparison with another whose intellectual converse was only with tutor and professor. That advantage is lent to the reader of these studies in the faith, who otherwise would be a solitary explorer of the truth. For when our author is discussing that difficulty of the man in the street, "Why did not God stop the war?" or "How is it the Bible says things that are not true?" or the eternal problems of death and after-death, he keeps alongside of his even Christian, the fellow-traveller who has less carefully prepared himself for the adventure. Nor does he let himself outstrip his companion too far when he deals with the scholar's perplexity of the Virgin Birth, or makes excursion into the more uncharted tract of speculation on the doctrines of the Trinity, Free-Will, and the Absolute.

The delicate section titled "Peter Pan and the Crucifix" should not be overlooked by readers.

I have been speaking of the journey of religious enquiry as the colloquy of a thinker and a thinker. It is something more than that. Just as in the animate creation life comes into being by an intercourse of two individuals in which each acts to the other as the part of the environment to which the single organism responds, so in the sphere of the religious existence the spiritual

commune of two can be the communion of the single believer with the mind of the Church his environment, something of which he meets with in the mind of a fellow. This is much to be remembered in our present controversy, which should be not controversy but communion, between Catholic and Modernist. This is what our Author is saying at the close of his book.

“ I think myself, Stephen, that the subjective voice of religious experience and the objective voice of the Church’s witness, should always act and react upon each other in a well-proportioned faith, and that the two are not divorced in practice but are parts of one whole, though I still hold the inner witness to be the senior partner ! ”

JOHN HUNTLEY SKRINE.

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INTRODUCTION

MY DEAR STEPHEN,

Your letter came as a surprise. You say you have shown some of the correspondence which has passed between us on religious topics to your old friend Professor X., and ask me to forgive you for doing this without permission.

Of course, dear man, I am only too glad you should make what use of it you see fit. That your friend has spoken kindly of my letters is naturally gratifying, and I am the more inclined to accept his verdict, that if published they might form a timely little volume, for at least two reasons.

The first and perhaps more important is, that having considerable leisure owing to circumstances of which you are aware, one would be glad to feel that at least some small portion of that leisure had been utilised for the good of others. Indeed, as you know, the origin of these letters was some such idea. You gave me to believe the subjects we had often discussed together over a cheery pipe were of considerable interest and help to yourself personally, and hence we drifted into this correspondence.

My second reason is, the strong sense I have, that men to-day are asking above all things for reality. There is abroad, as I see it, a widespread hatred of pose and shams, and in matters of faith, a burning desire that all who attempt to teach should give vital reason for the

faith that is in them, and not the conventional phrases that are fast growing suspect.

If, moreover, these letters are of any value whatever, it is because one has tried, at least, to say honestly what one thinks ; and to avoid the two extremes of senseless and prejudiced iconoclasm on the one hand, and cowardly conventionality on the other. Should a word that I have said hurt any unfamiliar with the particular trend of thought, I can only trust they will treat the writer with the same kindly tolerance and sympathy which you have always done. Much that is best in these letters is due to the sympathy which has elicited some further statement of my own point of view, for I believe thought can only live and move successfully in a sympathetic atmosphere.

I leave the letters, therefore, in your friend's hand, and am only too delighted that he should utilise them as he sees best.

Your old friend,
PAUL.

Grasps of Guess

I

DIVINE INTERVENTION

YOUR conversation with Mrs. A. interested me greatly. It is hardly to be wondered at that the horrors of the war, its hideous cruelty, the futility of the whole thing, and all in the name of this vaunted civilisation of ours, shook men's faith to the very core. You and I can scarcely realise what it meant to be robbed of the one upon whom all our earthly hopes were centred, in a moment of time, the awful blank, the having to go on living, and the terrible questioning of the heart : " Why, why, in the name of God, need it have been ? " And yet, of course, this attitude is utterly illogical, but the heart mocks at logic in its hour of misery.

Perhaps what strikes me still more, is that for the most part, it was not the men or women who had lost their all, who were ready to curse God and die, it was the disgruntled multitude who gave but little, and who thronged the lounges of hotels and corners of clubs, and found a morbid satisfaction in airing their grievances and arraigning their Maker.

I take it, however, that Mrs. A. is of a far more virile

type ; still the dilemma is old as the hills, and pure fallacy at that. Either God could have prevented the war, in the which case He is not all-loving ; or He could not, the machine He set going proving too great for Him, in which case He is not all powerful. It is the old dilemma which re-awakens in times of stress and doubt, but as you said in your letter, a very fallible one, and, moreover, logic at best is a poor instrument wherewith to silence the big intuitions of the human soul, the superb intuition of agonised faith which cries, " though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

Let us try to get to the root of the matter, Stephen. What do we mean when we say that God is omnipotent ? Are there things He cannot do ? Most certainly ! If we can agree that the one and only true definition of the Divine Being is that He is Love, not merely that He loves, but is Love essential, then it follows as a consequence, that there are things which He cannot do, He cannot act contrary to His love. In this case God's power is the power of love, and there is no such thing as a dilemma betwixt the two, all that love may do, we may believe He does and can do, but even God cannot act contrary to His nature.

Now, if in the divine counsels it be a bigger thing to give man a hand in his own creation, by the gift of free-will, then, as I see it, God cannot both give and take away. He must, so to speak, face the results of His gift—man's blunders, sins, confusions—knowing that the end destined in the eternal purpose will justify all.

Just as bodily disease comes to a head in a tumour or ulcer, and thus rids the system of the poison which spells death, so the abuse of free-will, individualism—whether of men or states—running riot, ends in plague and

strife. This is bound to be, for in the state as in the human body there is a certain *vis medicatrix naturæ*, a tendency ever striving for health and seeking to discharge the poisonous elements in order that a better condition of things may exist. The thunderstorm in nature, the ulcer in the human body, the revolution and bloody war in nations—are not everyone of these efforts to disperse elements which are harmful and which in the two latter instances, at any rate, are due to the abuse of a God-given freedom of action? And is not the presence of such a healing power in our midst an argument on behalf of faith, an assurance that goodness is really stronger than evil, despite appearances?

And, to return, if we can go further than this and say that though God cannot take back His gift, He can and does share with men the use he makes of this gift, and that the death of Christ was in part meant to teach us this; then the ultimate agony of the war was not that of Mrs. A., or of you or me, but of the wounded, broken heart of God Himself; broken in this sense, that He feels and shares the whole, though presumably with the knowledge that the ultimate destiny of the race He has so endowed, remains assured.

This question of the divine omnipotence was brought before my mind from another point of view, only the other day, by a letter I had from Roger Dunne, the Squire's grandson, to whom I had lent one of Scott Palmer's books. He remarked that the author seems to think there are things God cannot do, and in that case what is the use of prayer, e.g., praying that a parent or son should not be killed in the war. In my reply I tried to explain to him the idea of a fixed order of nature, that is to say, so far fixed that we rely upon its stability in

our response to its laws. I pointed out that progress in knowledge and experience involved this sense of stability. It is because we can learn to understand the laws which govern the currents of the sea and the air that sailing and flying are possible. We stake everything on these fixed laws, hence to ask God to alter them in answer to prayer is an absurdity.

Do you agree? And if so, what is the solution of the problem? You see the boy raised a very real difficulty. To my mind the answer lies along these lines: the action of spirit is upon spirit, the density of matter is less responsive to spirit, and God, moreover, does not alter fixed laws at our desire; but he can and may alter our relation to those laws. Take, for example, a boy praying for his father at the war, that he may come through unscathed, as Roger did daily, and, as a matter of fact, Major Dunne did return safe and sound. Well! Is it wholly absurd to say that though we cannot believe that God deflects the line of a bullet, He may yet work within the spirit of the man who is in the danger zone, so that he shall feel impelled to take cover at the right moment?

Tell me honestly what you think about this. If there is a God who hears and answers prayer, such a course of action on His part should not be contrary to common sense or reason. This does not solve, however, a much bigger question why many more lives are not spared in answer to prayer.

We are up against the whole problem of intervention. For myself I believe in such intervention, if by intervention one means the impact of the spirit of God upon the mind and spirit of man, that impact assisted by prayer, seems to me an essentially sane doctrine; there are,

however, several qualifying factors to be taken into consideration.

I expect you will agree with me that God does not intervene in the sphere of natural law, we have seen the necessity for stable conditions in this region. Now war of which we are speaking is, in a sense, such a law, it is the focussing of certain natural forces for a definite purpose, the death of the combatants ; to speak brutally war means killing men, and the side which kills most wins. Thus one can understand the necessity for the best and bravest to suffer, also my illustration above is, of course, limited in its applications.

Another qualifying factor is, I think, that God does not impinge upon man's free-will ; just as life insinuates itself into matter, so God insinuates Himself into the soul of man. In His own words He stands at the door and knocks, but He does not pick the lock. If wars arise as a result of the evils brought about through men's misuse of free-will, I cannot expect God to intervene to prevent them : the evil, as I see it, horrible though it be, must come to a head. In the case of the individual combatant such help as I picture God giving depends on the free-will of the recipient. There can be no favouritism with God, but if one life is spared rather than another, surely it is due to one of two causes, either to a greater response to the divine impact, or to a flow of natural sequences which God has not infringed upon.

In the former case our own mental and spiritual condition must render divine help availing or the reverse. It is one thing to receive a divine intuition and another to act upon it.

Some years ago a dear friend of mine lay very ill, to all intents and purposes she was dying, her husband and

the specialist who came to watch the case, practically waited the end. Lying in a comatose condition, she told me later, she felt the presence of Christ in her soul and heard a voice which told her she had yet much to do and suffer in the world. This was many years ago, and to-day she is alive and well. Now I see no reason whatever to doubt the validity of the experience, mystics and psychologists can give similar instances ; I do feel, however, that God did not so much check the course of the physical malady, as give strength to the spirit which enabled it to do battle with the disease ; and, moreover, Stephen, I think He was able to give such strength, if I may say so reverently, because He found a will responsive to His impulse of help, a certain spiritual tone which made such help possible. Now this bears upon my point, that God's intervention is aided or checked by our own wills, that free-will therefore is a qualifying factor in divine intervention.

One further qualifying factor, as I see it, is the love of God. We have always to remember, that the omnipotence of God is that of love, and hence love alone knows the best form the answer to our prayer shall take, whether it be best in the eternal sense, for us and for him, and for the world at large, that the life of our loved one be preserved.

In short, I must believe in divine aid, call it intervention or what you will, or lose some of my sense of the value of prayer : but I must at the same time recognise that there are qualifications, some of which I can perceive and possibly others which are beyond my finite understanding. And, for myself, if there should arise a controversy betwixt my logic and my intuitions I would say : " Trust your intuitions."

Don't you think, that to thank God for the gift of free-will—that He has placed us on a plane above the rest of creation, and has given us the inestimable joy of sharing in our own creation : and at the same time to blame Him for the results of the misuse of His gift, the pangs, the horrors and miseries we have achieved, the spiritual swaddling clothes in which we lie immersed—is but to act the part of peevish, fretful children ? But it's precious hard not to be peevish sometimes, Stephen man, when it's our own happiness that is at stake.

II

FREE-WILL

I WAS very glad to have your reply to my last and to find that, on the whole, you agree with me as to divine intervention. I gather you think that I use the word free-will a little carelessly, and remind me of my own *obiter dicta* as to defining terms ; you also ask me very pertinently whether one can in any real sense call a man free who is dogged by his heredity—as to some extent all men are.

Now this opens up a considerable train of thought, and I scarcely know how far I am competent to deal with it, but I will try my best, and I think I have just a few glimmerings of light which may interest you.

To begin with I suppose free-will is really a misnomer, for no man's will is altogether free, and the expression, as you say, badly needs analysing and defining. Strictly speaking, I take it, free-will is the goal at which we are aiming, rather than a possession already ours ; and hence my use of the word in my last was incorrect, but pardonable in the sense that one was using a term in its common acceptance. As regards the true meaning of the phrase it appears to me that the record of science shows us life as ever moving more and more towards freedom. At every stage man is less and less hampered by his environ-

ment, the tools he invents, the machines he makes, are elements setting free his powers for other purposes. If one may judge the whole evolutionary process by such factors, one would incline to see freedom as a definite goal ahead of us ; and is not this also what Christ Himself teaches us ? " Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin . . . if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." We have here to some extent a clue as to what He expected as the issue of His work. He, too, saw freedom as a goal for men to aim at and declared that such freedom was the birthright and potential possession of His disciples.

Since, then, free-will in its true meaning is an end to aim at rather than a present possession, in what sense do we use the word to-day ? Don't you think we mean simply a consciousness of choice ? Man as distinct from the animal has a definite power of choice, by reason of his intelligence he is able to see two alternatives and to decide which he will follow, or, at least, which he wishes to follow. It is true that in his choice he may be biassed by hereditary instincts, weakness of will and the like, but it remains true that every man who is not a degenerate or imbecile is conscious of this power and lives momentarily almost by making use of it ; and hence it is this that we mean when we use the term free-will, and it was of this power and its abuses I spoke in my last. But, as we have seen, our use of this conscious sense of choice is by no means yet free, it is hampered by other factors, about these I must say something.

Freedom, by the way, Stephen, of course, cannot mean license, it cannot mean freedom to run counter to the laws of life, just the reverse: If it has any real meaning at all, it must be that we have the power to fulfil our life, to use

our own will, which in us is a spark of the creative will, in order to move with the great current of life, to allow ourselves to be borne onwards with the stream of being and so to resist the tendencies which check progress. Hence, in the case of a choice of action, our will is only free when it is impelled to choose the better as against the worse, to go with life rather than to ally itself to the inertness of things which oppose. For surely there can be no freedom which chooses death rather than life ! Since life is all, and deadness, in a sense, an illusion, freedom must in reality be a function of life, and no will is free which works against itself, so to speak, against the life that is, of which it is an individualised expression. Thus, freedom and choice are in reality not identical : we can choose evil, but, as I see it, we cannot be free and choose evil ; such choice involves, in reality, a bias against true freedom, it means that the will is not yet free.

I come now to your main point, heredity, and with regard to this the trend of modern thought seems to be that its influence has been decidedly over-rated. I would like to cite two authorities on this point. The first is Henri Bergson. He tells us that hereditary instincts are passed on almost entirely through the sperm or re-productive cells, and not through the somatic or body-tissue cells, and thus life carries on her processes from generation to generation very largely independently of the peculiar habits and characteristics of the individual, these latter appear to be mainly located in the somatic and not the all-important sperm cells. He excepts, however, certain vices which act directly on the sperm or heredity-bearing cells, mentioning in particular alcoholism, probably doping of all kinds, and, one would imagine, immorality also.

Bergson deduces that individual heredity therefore plays but a minor part in man's history.

My other witness shall be Benjamin Kidd, who goes so far as to declare that a child's mind is like a clean slate on which nothing is yet written. I must frankly confess that I doubt this, the evidence as yet being very incomplete ; but, nevertheless, he brings some rather remarkable examples from the animal world in proof of his position. One experiment of his may perhaps interest you. He found that wild duck, which, as you know, are the most timid of birds, were quite fearless if approached before the mother bird had instilled fear by a warning note. This is only one of many instances which he utilises to show that heredity has been over-emphasised ; and that of the two factors in social and spiritual evolution, heredity and environment, environment is probably the more important. The truth of this is largely borne out by such a work as the Barnardo Homes, where heredity is often at its lowest, but yet in the new environment the percentage of failures is very small.

I don't quite know how psycho-analysis stands with regard to evidence like this, but I gather that the unconscious mind is made up of crude racial instincts and desires and, that just as the sewerage of a great city may be utilised and turned into the white beams of pure light, so the sewerage of these primitive instincts may be brought to the surface and sublimated, they need not form a barrier to our spiritual growth. This sublimation seems to me the most important truth the psycho-analyst has to give us.

If then my reasoning has been at all correct, we possess a definite sense of choice on which heredity has a possibly less important influence than has been supposed ;

yet, none the less, we are yet very far from freedom, owing to the fact that our wills are biassed by animal and other tendencies which act as a brake to our progress. Like St. Paul, we find ourselves saying: "That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I."

In that fine little book, "The Faith and Modern Thought," Bishop Temple points out that the man who says he can do right, if he chooses, is guilty of the heresy of a certain Pelagius of whom you and I read in our school-days, and then goes on to show that only love, the love of God seen in Christ, seen at its white heat in the drama of the Cross, can re-adjust the deflected will and set it pointing towards freedom. Ah! surely, it is ever so, that when we ponder what is the deepest in life we come back, as I shall do again and again in these letters, to the invincible fact of love as the centre of the mystery, as the true solvent for sin, and as the inner meaning of that freedom to which evolution points.

I cannot enter here into what I might call the destiny of circumstances, the Nemesis of the Greek plays, the inevitability which looms clearly in some of the best literature of every age. To say that these things have no bearing on man's freedom is manifestly absurd; to say that, like that of heredity, their power may easily be over-rated seems to me true—what do you think, Stephen? At least we must assert the inviolable right of spirit to be free, to maintain its fine poise and equability, face to face with whatever blows from so-called fate or circumstance.

"If the Son therefore"—the spirit of the unconquerable Christ within—"shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

That, at least, is true.

III

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

I WAS much amused by your conversation with your godson, Alec Ransome, he seems to be a promising youth and to have put you some quite good posers : " How can the Bible be inspired if it says things which are incorrect, as, for example, that the world was created in six days ; to call them periods of time won't do at all, for it distinctly says : ' the evening and the morning were the first day,' etc." Smart boy ! " Or, again, that the sun stood still, or that Jonah was in the fish's belly. One can't believe these things, can one ? And how do we know that the Bible is inspired and other books are not ? " Most ingenuous youth ! And you ask me, dear man, to help you in answering.

Well, I would try first of all to disabuse his mind of the thought that correctness is necessarily a feature of inspiration. So many well-educated people who should know better still confuse inspiration and infallibility, whereas in reality the two ideas are quite different. The *pons asinorum* is doubtlessly infallible, but though it has brought something very near tears to the eyes of many a weary youth, it certainly has never brought one iota of inspiration. No ! infallible things may be correct and at the same time utterly lifeless ; whatever inspiration means, it implies life at its highest and finest.

Then another point I would certainly make is that it is an error to speak of an inspired book—it is a commonplace of language which may be misleading. A book cannot be inspired, only men and women are inspired, and what they give us is vital, just in so far as they are so ; the degree of inspiration may vary very greatly, so it needs a certain something in ourselves to decide straight away whether this or that utterance of a great man is inspired or no.

We may be sure that Wordsworth's well-known lines on Tintern Abbey, or "Intimations of Immortality," have all the marks of inspiration ; they kindle a responsive mood in ourselves, a kind of mental and spiritual uplift, which we feel is the hall-mark of an inspired message. I am not supposing that the inspiration of Wordsworth and Isaiah's magnificent vision are necessarily parallel, but they have this common effect. We may read other poems of Wordsworth, however, and find they leave us cold, there is nothing vitalising in them, and they seem to us merely good rhythmic prose. It is not for me to say just what inspiration is, but, at least, I think it should possess this life-giving element, it should lift the reader for the moment into the same supramundane mood as the writer himself.

When we have said that the Bible is not, as Alec assumes, a single book, but a library written in many ages and by many authors, some of them entirely unknown, and, moreover, that the authors differ greatly in the degree of inspiration they possess, then we have removed some of the principal difficulties to clear thinking. No one would suppose, for example, that the story of the building of the Tower of Babel, with its naïve mythical setting, or the books of Esther and Nehemiah, or the cynical

Omar Khayyâm atmosphere of Ecclesiastes with its fine poetry, but decidedly agnostic sentiment, are in any sense comparable with Isaiah and many of the Psalms, or the writings of St. John and St. Paul.

Hence, don't you think what I have maintained is fairly clear, that the inspiration of the Bible, to use the common parlance, in no real sense depends on its historical or astronomical accuracy, nor on what is commonly called fact, but on quite other grounds? The writers use the knowledge both of science and history peculiar to their own age.

As regards science, to expect them to be correct would be to ask a miracle, it would be to demand of them to be untrue to the knowledge of those times. To find the Copernican system of astronomy outlined in the pages of Genesis would be an anomaly which would have left the early readers wholly in the dark. Don't you think that point is often overlooked?

With regard to history, we ask of them, truth to fact, so far as it is known to them, remembering that they lived and wrought in an uncritical age, and it is surprising how again and again the history of the Bible has been justified by subsequent discoveries, such as those made by help of the Rosetta Stone. It is now fairly certain, I suppose, that the Hebrews resided in Egypt at one period of their history, their departure was possibly sudden and dramatic. In Egyptian history this probably was only an episode, in the history of Israel it was an epoch. On the other hand, to the secular historian, Cyrus was a mighty prince whose conquests altered the face of history, whilst in the eyes of the Jewish prophets he was merely the tool of Jehovah, his relation to the destinies of Israel alone interesting the latter.

Thus far then we have cleared the way ; it remains to suggest a few more constructive thoughts with regard to the meaning of the inspiration of the Bible and its permanent value to ourselves. The Old Testament Scriptures were the sacred literature of one of the most remarkable people in history, they show us a small nation which developed a sense of supreme vocation by a kind of selective evolution. To this people, a simple pastoral race, schooled by close contact with nature and the big things, and in their earlier days free from the debilitating influence of cities, there came a sense of a divine calling ; an ethical consciousness which fitted them to be the religious teachers of the world ; a consciousness which enabled their seers again and again to declare, in tones of unwavering conviction : " Thus saith the Lord," and to bring a responsive conviction that God had indeed spoken by their mouth to those who heard.

Now, I imagine, if I were to stop here and go no further, than to assert that we have in the Bible the literature of a race who have been the unique teachers of religion to the world, I should have quite sufficiently upheld its spiritual value, taken as a whole, to be the inspired library it has been claimed to be. Like all great literature and all great art it is progressive, the teaching of the earlier books is yet embryonic, the Patriarchs are feeling after God, or is it God who is feeling after them ? We may view the phenomenon, I think, either way. I am not here going into the question of the historicity of the lives of Abraham and his immediate descendants, suffice it to say, we have the traditional history of a people, who more and more developed a knowledge of spiritual values, and thus became forth-tellers of the character and purposes of

Almighty God, and often through their superb spiritual intuition, fore tellers also, seers of the future.

I am afraid I know nothing of the Vedas or the sacred books of other nations, but I greatly doubt whether any other race has produced a literature of such high ethical and spiritual force, such pure monotheism, and one which has played so fine a part in creating the ideals of mankind in every age. This, of course, is taking the books as a whole and at their highest. Where shall we find a greater definition of religion than that of Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"; or a more inspired vision than that of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, so strikingly fulfilled in the person of Israel's greatest Son?

The Bible stands or falls by its spiritual power, by its vision of God, by the uplift it gives to those who read it rightly, with ears open to receive its message; and is not this just what we mean by inspiration? Whatever in the Bible, and of course there is much in a progressive history, lacks this note of high spiritual idealism and power we do right to pass by. In the last resort, it remains with ourselves to decipher degrees of truth, to distinguish the "Thus saith the Lord," from the faulty guesses of men seeking after God.

I have spoken almost entirely of the Old Testament, the difficulties which Alec has found are much less conspicuous in the New. But even here there are one or two points worth remembering; we should not, I think, place the utterances of St. Paul or any other apostle upon the same level of inspiration as those of our Lord, that seems to me a necessary distinction. Again, we have to remember that some of the sayings of Christ have suffered

in their transmission to ourselves. We do not assume—I think you will agree with this—that God has worked a miracle in order to preserve them in their present form. It is conceivable that the memories of the witnesses who heard and passed on to others the very words of Christ may have been quickened by the Holy Spirit, but that God miraculously kept the whole body of His teaching intact seems unlike the Divine working as we know it ; hence, if one saying of Christ's falls short, or seems to fall short, of the general spirit of His teaching, we may, in all reverence, hesitate in giving our allegiance to it. The sayings of Christ carry their own impress of divinity so clearly, that if one or more hurt our sense of congruity, better far to say, " either Jesus never spoke thus, or I do not yet understand this saying," than through a false sense of reverence to bind it as a burden on the soul.

If, my dear Stephen, you can teach Alec to perceive for himself the varying grades of spiritual values in his Bible, and to cultivate this perception so that he responds naturally to that which is best and highest, then you will have indeed opened out to him a new world of thought and experience. Perhaps this is much to expect of a boy, and yet you remember, don't you, David Blaise in E. F. Benson's story and his first emotional contact with really great poetry, the eager joy, the new outlook it brought with it ? If a boy can read his Bible, not merely from a sense of duty, which to the youthful mind is ever a little dull, but from a perception of beauty, then he will have found the golden key wherewith to unlock its treasures.

And now one last word. Alec asks, " How do we know that the Bible is inspired and other books are not ? " As a matter of fact, we don't. It is not always easy to

say clearly in what sense the Bible differs from other great inspired works in art, poetry or ethics, but I think it is a question of degree rather than kind. Real inspiration can only be of one kind, can only mean that the man has seen and felt God in his heart, and been gifted with the power of uttering his experience. In the Bible at its greatest, in prophet, psalmist and evangelist, we have this inspiration in a supreme degree, a degree which, I take it, renders these books in a most real sense unique, and their writers the mouthpiece of God.

It is growing late, and as I lay down my pen and turn the light low, the sickle moon peers through the panes of my window making fantastic shadows with the branches of the great cedar on the lawn ; and above is a star-studded dome of wondrous blue. On such a night it is not hard to believe in inspiration, one's soul is a little still, as though she fain would catch some faintest whisper of the voice which came in living tones to seers and prophets of old.

IV

THE GOSPEL RECORDS

ALEC RANSOME'S inquiries as to the veracity of the Gospel records intrigued me, for his questions were unusual for a youth of that age, and had a ring of sincerity. You must certainly bring him down to Heathercombe, and we will combine fishing with much talk. Meanwhile, I am glad to add the postscript you suggest to what I said about the inspiration of the Bible.

Practically what you want can all be found in the writings of Professor Burkitt, Dr. Moffatt, and others. It needs but to condense what they have told us. We learn that if the material for a portrait of Jesus is not large, it is sufficient. The gospel story is no longer a far-away, beautiful picture, on which pious minds love to dwell ; it is living, vital history, and the central figure stands out, not with the vague beauty of some exquisite fresco we can only love and admire, but dare not approach too near, but becomes instead definite and clear-cut, and not devoid of the halo because the feet are firm-planted on earth.

As Alec is aware, our earliest portrait of Jesus is that of Mark. Here we have a Palestinian picture of the vivid, virile figure of the Nazarene prophet. There are in his

record the evident touches of an eye-witness, possibly St. Peter. Such sentences as "And when He had looked round about them," and "But when He had turned about and looked on His disciples, He rebuked *Peter*," suggest personal reminiscence. Again, we have Aramaic words, which have crept into the Greek, and quotations from the old Hebrew Scriptures, as distinct from the later Septuagint—all evidence of the first value to the veracity of our silhouette. There is the mystery of the trial and death, there is the something which happened after, something which lifted those first disciples from timidity and fear to courage and dauntless faith.

Then, Stephen, there are those matchless sayings which quicken the soul and stimulate the will, and which Mark has not preserved for us, but which critics tell us are part of the unknown gospel Q, which Matthew and Mark have drawn from, and which may possibly be, or include, the logia of Matthew, spoken of by Papias. The problem of the fourth gospel is less simple, but may we not feel we have in this uniquely beautiful MS. the fulfilment of a Johannine promise: "He shall take of Mine and shew it unto you?" In other words, the Gospel of St. John, whoever the writer be, is possibly a spiritual interpretation of the portrait of Jesus, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I will discuss this more fully in another letter.

But to come to the final point in this brief summary. In order to recover the atmosphere of the past, whether it be sacred history or so-called secular, which, of course, is not secular, we need the aid of the historian first of all. We want to sift and arrange our facts. Then, secondly, we must have the gift of *vision*, the power of recognising the true, when we see it. There is surely such a thing as

spiritual hall-mark, and it is this I would like Alec to try and develop for himself ; to learn to say : “ This and this must be true, not because some critic says it is true, but because it rings true. These words no human mind could have invented ; they have lain imbedded in the mind of some disciple, and shall live while time is in the souls of other believing disciples.”

To be able to do this is to develop critical insight, and just as we learn to know a really great work of Art, not because it is cried up by the critics of the moment, but because of its intrinsic merit ; so we shall learn to know the sayings of Jesus by our inner consciousness of their truth and assurance that, even if they come through a Christ-inspired disciple, they derive from Christ.

I hope this is not too subtle for Alec. We will hammer it out when he comes to Heathercombe.

V

CRITICISM AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

You were speaking in your last about the criticism of the New Testament and its results. Well, I suppose only the expert can sum these up. One of the most delightful books I know dealing with the subject in a popular manner is Nairne's "Faith of the New Testament." I have read it through several times, and its reverence and spiritual insight appealed to me greatly.

As regards criticism generally, it appears to group itself into two kinds, objective and subjective ; by objective criticism I mean that which deals with the facts to hand, the MSS., language, historical setting, etc. ; whereas subjective criticism deals with the intrinsic probability of this or that event. The former is more or less assured, the results are tabulated and accepted as proven, the latter must vary according to the mental propensities of the critic.

For example, the question of the miraculous is, I take it, entirely one for subjective criticism. An increased knowledge of science, the tremendous bearing on such matters of modern psychology, and the tendency to reverence more and more what we call the fixed order of nature, which of course can only be fixed within certain limits ; all these things lead a large number of thoughtful

men to see in the abnormal only examples of law on more rarified planes, and to discredit the miraculous where it can be reduced to such law. It is felt that Jesus Christ because He was very Man, no less than Son of God, did only such actions as human nature at its highest, in its fullest fruition, could do, and such reasoning seems to me to be sound.

When we speak of law we are often a little vague, I fancy, as to what we really mean, and to most of us it is difficult to get away from the thought of a mechanical self-running nature. We Christians must define in terms of God, and, just as my old tutor at Merton used to say, "Verify your quotations," so I would say, "analyse or define your terms." What do you and I mean by the word law? Don't you think we mean the channel which God cuts for Himself wherein to act? Such a channel may involve limits, just as the course of a river involves the river banks, but these limits are self-imposed.

If God is really immanent in the whole process of evolution, then the laws of this process are the media of the divine action, and it may be that the so-called miraculous events are but the manifestation of this immanent spirit on its highest planes.

I suppose one of the greatest problems of modern criticism is that of the Birth stories. Critics vary greatly as to their historicity, even a moderate critic like Du Bose speaks of them as: "A highly elevated and poetic series of pictures in which spiritual and legitimately imaginative powers are raised to the highest point of understanding and appreciation of the transcendent divine fact conveyed," and the tendency of less conservative thought is to believe them to be of later date than the Gospels to which they are attached,

The whole question of the Virgin Birth is probably involved, and the point at issue, is whether the Incarnation stands sure, independently of that special mode. Scholars seem divided, but reverent thinkers tell us this much, that we may be certain of facts and yet less certain as to the manner by which these facts came about. The myths of Isis and Horus, and Syrian folklore, may each have had their part in formulating the frame-work of the story, though I should hesitate to dogmatise on the matter.

I am conscious, indeed, of a sense of diffidence in dealing with a subject so immense, but I have tried to think reverently, and incline to feel, that if, as you and I believe, Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Son of God, the supreme manifestation of that immanent spirit of which we have spoken, that His divinity is the more palpable, His incarnation the more real, if we can conceive of Him entering life by the same gate as His brethren. He who submitted to all ordinances for man's sake, and was claimed to be "the first-born of many brethren," would to my thinking be more completely Himself in submitting to the God-created law of human birth. To me it is so like Jesus Christ to do this.

"Such ever was love's way, to rise it stoops."

But I would not argue, and here I leave the question in all reverence. I have tried, however, sometimes to ask myself, granted the human birth of Jesus, how the miracle of the Incarnation came about, for miracle it must be ; but conceivably to myself, a miracle of fulfilment and continuity, rather than one of breaking off the human entail and starting again. To myself I conceive the possibilities on some such lines as these, and remember, Stephen, one is on very holy ground, and may only offer

the merest grasp of guess ; be sure and give me your own point of view in your next, and do not hesitate to challenge what I have said.

Let us suppose in the divine process of evolution—and we start from the premiss that this process is divine : that it was given to one nation to evolve a peculiar sense of God-consciousness they felt themselves to be chosen, in some special sense to be a blessing to the whole world. Geographical situation as well as the particular training may have had their part in kindling this sense of vocation. Be this as it may, it came to its climax in the persons of the prophets ; they focussed the national God-consciousness, they knew themselves in direct contact with God and that the message they uttered was inspired by Him. This message received its final form in the Messianic hope. Now let us see how this hope trickled through two centuries of apocalyptic vision, inspiring the deeds of the Maccabees, flaming in the souls of those whose faith never yielded to formalism, the secret few, true to the great tradition and calling of their race.

Of such a family, picture Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She has fed on the Messianic hope from tenderest childhood, to be the Mother of the Messiah has probably been the sole ambition of her life ; then, like Joan of Arc of later days, she is wafted into the atmosphere of the prophets of old. It is borne into her through dream and vision that her hope shall be fulfilled. You doubtless remember Alfred Noyes' exquisite "Slumber Songs of the Madonna," with their haunting dream lines ?

Well, to return, through the nine months of her waiting, the faith which is voiced in the Magnificat grows stronger, the hope more certain, and into such an environment the Child Jesus was born. In the evolution of the race, had

not the pregnant moment come, predetermined before creation, when God could reveal Himself in and through the human, and the perfect fusion of the divine and human take place? As yet our knowledge of the psychology of personality is very incomplete, but there are faint gleams from this region which throw a certain light on the problem.

Then again, the analogy of science is interesting. Bergson points out that life on entering into relation with matter had passively to accept the laws of matter, it insinuated itself into the material and then triumphed over it. May it not be that when God would incarnate Himself in man, He must first accept the ordinary laws of evolution and then in His perfect divinity triumph over them? And science further shows us that when life would cope with the inertness of matter it completely succeeded at only one point—man. Is there not rather a fine analogy here, Stephen? When God would divinise human nature, He, too, because of the inertness of the material, on which He had been working, was successful, but at one point also, in the person of the one man in whose divinity we are believers. In a sense every step is a divine re-birth, part though it be of one process. From the inorganic to the organic; from the plant to the animal; from the animal to man; from man to the Christ!

Yes! indeed a miracle, but a spiritual miracle, and not merely a physical one, and, as I have pointed out, one of fulfilment and continuity. In Jesus Christ the full flower of human creation is revealed, like, and yet how unlike, his brethren.

I think I have more than exemplified in this letter what I meant by subjective criticism, but pass over

anything you do not like, at any rate it remains abidingly true, in the matchless words of the writer of St. John's Gospel.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . . and the Word became flesh.”

VI

THE INCARNATION AND MODERNISM

THANK you for sending me that newspaper cutting of Father Vaughan's Sermon on Modernism. No! I had not seen it, it interests me greatly for it puts succinctly the present attitude of a certain type of Catholicism to modern thought. You will remember he says, if correctly reported :

"It would seem that Modernists, having no use for the Christ of the Gospels and tradition, have turned down everything about His Christianity but its phraseology. . . . With the divine Christ torn out of Christianity, Modernists will find that, instead of embracing a live religion, they are hugging a corpse."

This is a caricature, of course, but it does express, with a certain amount of exaggeration what many earnest people are feeling, possibly my neighbour Arden amongst the number. It really means that a matter of faith is looked at from two divergent points of view. The appeal made on the one hand, is to an official utterance, on the other to a spiritual experience. On the one hand, the utterances of Christ explained and endorsed by the Church, stand forth as an external code of belief, which it is heresy to tamper with. On the other, we have

the experience of Christ and His Church consolidating itself and framing itself into the assertion of His divinity.

Just because these two standpoints are apparently so different, those who hold them become suspect of each other. Alas ! that it should be so, but since we care so much, there is a certain inevitability in the matter. Tell me if you think I am right in my diagnosis. It all hinges, I suppose, on our conception of authority, whence and how it derives, whether it is a power from without, or whether in the last resort its stronghold lies within.

Did Jesus Christ, definitely, make an official utterance as to His divine nature? That He gave glorious hints, glimpses, suggestions, we may all agree. But did He come with the regalia and might of a Being from other regions, and bid men accept Him as such? Or did He not rather come in the guise of one of ourselves, in a perfect humanity, rich in every true human value, tender, pitiful, strong, courageous, the very flower of His nation and people; and did He not so experience God in His own life, and feel His soul beat in harmonious unison with His Father, that He knew Himself divine, not to the exclusion of His brethren, for they too were sons of the same Father; but in an absolutely unique sense; so that He spoke with authority as no scribe or Pharisee could speak, and yet with absolute freedom from official proclamation?

He could say, if I am right, "I and my Father are One" for the simple reason that this was absolutely true; and knowing this true, He could go further, if we may accept the witness of the author of St. John's Gospel and declare "Before Abraham was, I am!" Those were daring words, Stephen, "*I am.*" The utterance of confident experience of the divine, of a deep assurance that His own human life was somehow an outflow of the

self-existent God, and hence that it was given to Him to be the Revealer of that God to His brethren.

Now the gist of what I have said is just this: Jesus knew His divinity by right of His own unique personal experience, and we men know that divinity in so far as we too experience Him truly. Clutton Brock says, in his "Studies of Christianity," "a new Absolute had been born into the world, a personal absolute, of which the image is the Crucifix." If we have found this true, if Christ has indeed brought the world a new Absolute, so that it can interpret life through Him, and the values of Life according to His values; and if we find that just so far as we do this, power flows into ourselves and we are ourselves spiritually reborn—need we trouble very greatly because we are called "Modernists" and our experimental faith is held insufficient? I am none the less conscious of a certain diffidence in speaking so frankly. It may well seem to you as though I were offering a merely subjective experience in the place of the authority of the Church. This is true in a limited sense, and yet it is as a Churchman I am speaking, and I believe that nothing I have put forward is contrary to Church authority rightly understood.

What I am much hoping to show you, is that in reality the creed of the Church is at once authoritative and official, because it is of the Spirit; that only so could it have lasting permanent authority, since the vision of the spirit remains, whilst the mind-forms, in which that vision shapes itself, shift their angle of sight; they are good binoculars but with limited range.

After all, Stephen, how does any Church obtain her authority? Is it not in the long run simply "Back to Christ!" You agree, don't you? Jesus Christ so

experienced God in His own soul that He knew Himself divine, and those who became His disciples and realised the power of His life upon their own souls declared Him to be the only begotten Son of God, as distinct from His brethren, who, at most, were only in the process of being begotten ; and, moreover, the Church endorses the witness of these men.

Does not the Church's authority then rest, in the final resort, on a subjective experience ? On the consciousness of Christ Himself, on the further consciousness of those who have found Him divine in their own lives ? And are we not wise to accept this witness which she has endorsed, without over curious inquiry as to what exactly the Deity of Christ means, and what mind-frame we are to use to fully describe it ? And I would go further and ask whether just as the dogma of the Church began in a subjective experience, in each generation it must not be re-affirmed by such experience, if it is to be the living thing, you and I believe it.

If then the modern Churchman should seek to offer an apologia for the faith that is in him, I imagine the line he would take up is, that his method is genuinely primitive. The Christology of the New Testament was the outcome of experience, guided as we believe by the Holy Spirit ; these men found the fact of the Incarnation implicit in their experience, this fact is not so much stated as an authentic utterance, but rather as a revelation learnt through knowing Christ. It has filtered down the ages as historic dogma : an infallible official declaration : but I believe we approach more closely to primitive truth and method when we shift the emphasis from authority to spirit. Truth is authoritative to-day, and will be to-morrow, just in as far as it is spiritually demon-

strable. Theology is a science of the spirit, and hence must demonstrate itself spiritually, and the modern Churchman is assured that it does so, that is why Father Vaughan's assertions are merely caricature.

I have said that it is perhaps unwise to define too clearly just what we mean by the divinity of Christ, and yet it is possibly more honest to make an attempt, however faulty. For myself, I think I mean that at every stage of His life the content of His human soul was divine. By means of a perfect childhood, boyhood, and manhood, He revealed His Father.

Under the influence undoubtedly of modern psychology, the trend of critics to-day is to think of the human and divine natures, less and less as ponderable substances placed side by side, and more and more in terms of personality, and the interpenetration of spirit with spirit. Even in so material a thing as the Bunsen burner, gas and air do not lie side by side, the one penetrates the other, and as a resultant, the clarity and colour-tone of the flame is altered. This is only an analogy, but it is surely suggestive.

To return, if you ask on what I base this assumption of the divine content of the human soul of Christ, since it is a big one to make, I do so, not on any individual saying of Jesus, but on the personality of the Man Himself who stands behind the Gospel records, on the picture which those unskilled artists drew, with no purpose save that of uttering truth, no creed to formulate, nor position to support, and which yet stands there for all time, divinely human in its lineaments ; and secondly, on the experience of the Christian Church ; as I have said, men found Christ's action upon themselves divine, and

if one sees the fruit divine, one asks of what nature the seed whence this fruitage springs.

If it be true that faith in Christ produces a certain type of life, which we call divine, then, Stephen, what of the Man who mediated and continues to mediate that type of life?

Theology like every other science begins with a hypothesis. In a purely Theistic theology that hypothesis, I take it, is the existence of God. In a Christian theology it is this divine quality in the soul of Jesus, which is at once the expression of His own conscious relationship to God, and the power which He mediates to all who truly and unreservedly become His disciples. This hypothesis of the Christian is no official utterance, it is the basic witness of the Spirit, inducing that experience, which I have called the true ground of authority.

Do you know that fine saying of Coventry Patmore's? "Christianity is an experimental science, and the best answer to one who questions 'If it be true?' is, 'Try it.' " In other words, *solvitur ambulando*.

Just one word more, I have known something of the teaching of Unitarianism, and it leaves me cold, it has a fine ethical Gospel for the upright, but no message, so far as I understand it, for the man in the gutter wrestling with his sin, it lacks the transmuting power of the Cross of Christ. "By their fruits shall ye know them."

I have written you, I fear, an unconscionably long letter in reply to your own, but the subject is immense, and I can only close it with a regretful sigh that my treatment of the matter is so inadequate. If anything I have said really appeals to you, be sure to tell me, and so "Good-night," and the Christ of whom we have been talking have you in His keeping.

VII

MODERNISM AND THE CHRISTIAN CREED

I AM glad my last letter appealed to you, and that you recognised that what was speculative in it, was written not for mere speculation's sake, but to try and visualise truth; to create for one's self a mind-form, which should not so much contain one's faith, that, of course, is impossible, as be, at least, not contrary thereto.

Dr. Arden and I often have a chat together over an evening pipe, and he is generally illuminating. He is, of course, quite of the old school.

"I don't see what you fellows want," he will say "always discussing these things, it may be very well for yourselves, but what about the man in the street, where is he coming in?"

In a sense the doctor is right, the man in the street matters immensely; but what he does not appear to see is that we have learnt during the last decade to look at life from a new angle, and if we would be teachers, honesty and truth are the two foremost qualities men ask of us. They have no use for our half-veiled dogmas, and esoteric truth is anathema to them.

"We never shall understand things so immense," continues the doctor meditatively, sending rings of smoke towards the ceiling, "isn't it better to accept what has

been revealed, and not try to explain? Who can explain the mystery of the Incarnation or the Trinity?"

Well of course, this is true up to a point, but there is a fallacy behind it, for one begins by assuming that we are quite clear as to what is revealed, and we build our conclusions upon that. Arden, dear man, starts with the infallible Bible of his childhood, he finds all he needs in that, and he is perplexed by the present unrest and dangerous tendency of thought; but he has failed to grasp that the Bible does not claim to be infallible in that sense—I have spoken of this elsewhere. Further, he does not see that the writers of our Gospels were still too near the light to dogmatise, they experienced it rather than systematised it; hence the big truths of our faith are rather implicit than explicit in their words.

We cannot to-day satisfy the man who comes to us with a straight question, as to what we think about the divinity of Christ, or the doctrine of the Trinity, by merely quoting texts. We can, I believe, so show him the figure who passes through those pages, the one who stands behind the historic record and whom the careful reader feels to be greater far than any mere word or deed described; we can bring him into the atmosphere of that presence and say to him, "this man claimed to be the Son of God, and it is for you and me in personal contact with his life and example to discover just what He meant."

This is one of the greatest adventures of the human soul, possibly *the* greatest. And in order to help us in this discovery there is the tradition of the ages, but to tell me all is clearly revealed in the pages of Scripture is to confuse the issue: doctrine as I have said was scarcely formulated, men were living and feeling and exploring the wealth of the new discovery; but they had scarcely

defined for themselves the riches they found in Christ, though an evolution of thought is clearly present, and the master-minds like St. Paul and the writer of St. John's gospel were swiftly being borne along on its current.

It comes to this, I suppose, we think and talk about these things not because we necessarily have doubts, nor because we want to cut loose from the past, but to a large extent because we honestly want to know just where we are. The scientific turn of mind tends to accuracy of thought.

Thought often appears to run in cycles, during the Victorian era the divinity of Christ was emphasised often at the expense of His humanity. Many an honest well-meaning parson doubtless propounded samples of early Church heresies from his pulpit, quite unawares. I wonder whether there is any connection between the emphasis on the divinity of Christ, and the materialistic emphasis on the other side of scientific pioneers like Huxley and Spencer. May it not be that it was granted the Church to see this truth in a very special degree, when it was most needed as a defence against materialism?

To-day the science of Spencer and others of his school is more or less of a dead letter, and it is interesting to observe that the truth men are grasping at, in the region of faith, is the real humanity of Christ. I think this is rather a striking fact—the more material our science, the greater need for the truth of our Lord's divinity: the more spiritual the psychology of man's nature, the greater the desire for the converse truth of His humanity. The faith of the Church is that these two points of view are reconcilable, if not in the frame-work of the intellect, certainly in the region of the experience; and it has been

well said that we must find out metaphysic through the gateway of experience.

To come to close quarters with the problem, the doctor is no doubt right that we can't explain what transcends our understanding, every teacher will honestly accept that. But this does not imply that we are to keep our thought-forms in a condition of nebulous uncertainty. We must understand up to a point, we must be able to give a reasonable answer for the faith that is in us.

For myself, were I a teacher, I would try to show that the Church is not a land-locked harbour wherein the soul may rest at careless ease, without effort of thought or desire of discovery ; but rather it is a wide, strong-built shelter, thrusting out to the open, wherein the little bark may steal for safe anchorage, only on the condition, however, that she prove sea-worthy and ready to face the dangers of the deep. In short, the Church is no dry-dock, she is a sea-wide harbour, and the two things are very different.

For the most part I believe that the men of this age must learn their creed by experiencing it, this is the truth they are asking for. They must know Jesus Christ in their own lives, and finding Him all-sufficient there, rise to the height of His divinity. Their metaphysic, their mind-frame, must be moulded in the crucible of such experience. Better far to possess real faith in the human Jesus of St. Mark than a merely metaphysical faith in the Christology of St. Paul and St. John.

I would ask your Student Christian friend of whom you speak to presuppose the creeds which have survived the ages as a hypothesis to work from in the region of experience—to start with the real human Jesus, very man, in whose humanity the very God revealed Himself,

and see if life does not justify the experiment. He will put away the dry-dock idea of the Church and find it instead a true harbourage, but a harbourage for adventurous spirits or souls which are sea-worthy and prepared to obey their Captain's command to launch out into the deep, not necessarily of speculative thought but of Christian experience. My old friend Arden has done this, whatever his mental outlook, his experience is very real. And remember, Stephen, it's not speculation we want, but simply that men may find Christ for themselves and see the God in Him.

VIII

THE TWOFOLD GOSPEL

WHAT is the Gospel, Stephen? It seems an absurd question to ask after twenty centuries of Christianity, and yet if you were to put it to half a dozen average and intelligent beings you would probably find the answer varied according to the temperament and outlook of the individual. Of course, the word gospel means "good-tidings," but the point at issue is, in what does the central fact of those "good-tidings" consist? To one man it is the fatherhood of God, first fully revealed and mediated by Jesus Christ. To another it is the atonement from sin, whereby the world has been redeemed and reclaimed for God. To another it is the coming of the Kingdom of God, potentially present, but to be fully actualised in society—and so forth. To some of us, perhaps, it is a combination of all these.

Now, for myself, when I try to read the New Testament carefully, comparing the Synoptics with St. John, and the Epistles with both, I more and more incline to believe that there are two distinct gospels presented to us; the one is simple and non-doctrinal, wherein the wayfarer, however unlearned, shall not stumble; the other more complex and more definitely concerned with the doctrine of the Person of Christ. The first I would

call "the Galilean Gospel," the second "the Mystic and Theologic." It is possible that the latter is implicit in the former, it is possible that both are the expression of Christ's own teaching, and that, as Dean Armitage Robinson has pointed out, His message differed with His audience ; the simple, practical teaching suitable for the minds of His Galilean friends is superseded by a mode of teaching of a different calibre in His Jerusalem ministry. This may well have been so. I don't know. Meanwhile, it is instructive to notice the difference.

The more simple gospel is, I take it, the Gospel of the divine Fatherhood. The critics doubtless would tell me it is the Gospel of the Kingdom, but we practically mean the same thing, for the Kingdom is the kingdom of a father as distinct from the old Hebrew legalist Theocracy. For the first time, God is revealed, with a full wealth of illustration as man's Father, infinitely loving and infinitely perfect, and man is called upon to know himself as God's son—"Ye *must* be perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect."¹ This is the simplest form of the Gospel. God is our Father and loves us utterly, we are potentially and may be in all actuality the sons of God. We are to take no thought for the morrow—why? Because our Father takes thought for us. Christ came to tell us this, and show us in His own Person what God is like. We perhaps feel the fact rather than are told it in the earliest records. God does not need that we approach Him by legal observances, as the Pharisees taught, nor that we should go out of the world, as the Ascetic and Mystic taught; for Jesus has brought religion into the market-place and shown men how to serve the Father in their daily life and employment. Every act may be

¹ Moffat's Version.

sacramental, may be done, that is, to the glory of God. The Kingdom is revealed in the simple symbolism of every day labour—the dragnet, the sower, the secret growth of the seed, etc. The world is the Father's house and we are the children of the house.

Such is the simple, less doctrinal teaching, I find in the Synoptics, a Gospel which has brought peace and joy to many a heart : to it, perhaps, we shall again and again return, however far we may be carried on the wings of philosophic thought or mystic intuition. At heart we are little children, and to know God as our Father in the deepest sense of the word, and ourselves His sons, Jesus Christ, our elder Brother, leading the vanguard homeward, is a strangely satisfying comforting creed.

But when one turns to St. John, St. Paul and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are conscious of another atmosphere, the content of the Gospel of Christ has to some extent altered ; it has become more mystic and theologic, it centres more definitely around the Person and work of Christ. In its simpler form the main theme of the message appears to be the being of God and man's relation to Him : Jesus is our Redeemer inasmuch as He reveals the Father and enables us to become His true sons : but His own Person although clearly felt and acknowledged is less accurately defined.

In the latter books, as I have said, the centre of gravity is shifted. No doubt this is the result of experience first of all. The little band of the faithful had learnt for themselves the power of their risen Master, and out of this experience arose the formula. I have spoken in other letters of how the creed of the Church arose primarily out of the divinely-taught experience of the Church : but the special mind-form in which any creed

shapes itself is, I suspect, never a sudden growth, it is a process in evolution. I think, if we look back a little, we may find the School in which the conception was formulated which was to have a world-wide acceptance. It is a wonderful thought, isn't it, that the conquests of Alexander the Great helped to pave the way for the formulation of a great philosophy which should find its fullest expression in the Christian creed ?

It was at Alexandria, apparently, that the great Logos doctrine was formulated—there Hebrew thought met Greek thought, and became wedded. The Hebrew with his doctrine of a transcendent God and its corollary of human failure and propitiation met the Greek with his philosophy of an indwelling divine life pervading all things, and with a sense of sin but slightly accentuated, and out of this mating of thought there grew up the Apocryphal Wisdom literature. These two streams ran into each other, and we get the thought of this transcendent God mediating Himself through a divine Wisdom or Word. In one instance, at least, this wisdom is almost personified (Prov. viii), and in Philo this mediating wisdom is, as you know, the Logos. Here we have a mind-frame befitting the new experience. We must not forget, however, that we have also a definitely Jewish use of the term Word—the Word of God who spake by the Prophets ; and we cannot say how far the author of St. John was indebted to this Jewish, as distinct from the Alexandrian ideal, for his prologue. But to return, it is a dictum of evolution that desire and imagination fore-run actuality. In the idealism of these Wisdom writers, have we not, as in the vision of both Prophet and Apocalyptic, the imaginative fore-word, so to speak, to the great actuality, of the

coming of One who should Himself personify the desires and visions of these eager souls ?

Thus it came about that as men felt the power of the risen Christ, they sought to express that power in terms of thought, and they found the instrument to hand. He was the Eternal Wisdom of the Father, the Logos made flesh, the Mystic upholder of the universe. Hence there grew up the vision of the Theologic Christ ; the centre of gravity was removed from the earlier and more simple ideals to the great mystic conception of the Person of Jesus, and the meaning of that supreme act by which He leapt over the barrier which separated normal humanity from the divine, and released power for the men who believed in Him ; so that in Christ, in organic union with Him that is, they too might become Christ-men.

I take it, Stephen, that some such train of thought and experience links the more complex doctrine of St. John with the simpler Gospel of the Galilean Highlands. Is it a legitimate extension ? It is the faith of the Church that it is, that this emphasis of the supreme value of the Person of Christ is the necessary corollary to the experimental sense of His divinity. But it may very well be that there will ever remain those to whom the Gospel in its pristine simplicity will make its greatest appeal. It is, as it were, a simple domesticity, as distinct from a mystic idealism—of faith ; and because of this in our more simple moments we all come back to it. It suffices to know that we are the children of an infinitely loving Being, and that in Jesus we may see that Being focussed and revealed, and that this everyday life of little human cares and duties is the means of living unto Him and fulfilling His will.

But, again, there will be hours when we shall soar on

the wings of thought, when we shall reach out for a philosophy of the soul's contact with Christ, and the Mystery of His Person. Yet when once more tired by the controversy of the Schools, and perplexed by the uncertainties of our own thinkings, we drop down to the levels, let us not fear to rest there in quietude of confidence. Maybe when we lie a-dying, it is to that we shall chiefly turn, the Heaven which we visualise for ourselves will be the home-element of the soul, and it will be home, Stephen, because therein, in the language of George MacDonald, is a grand old arm-chair, the throne of the Father, not in literal material form, but somehow what it symbolises, the veritable reality. It is to the presence of a Father we shall go, please God, and it is the grace of the Son to have shown us that presence, and to have become Himself the way thereto.

Is this too anthropomorphic? But for us the vast ocean of Being, the mighty All, who holds the stars in His hand and whose is the music of the spheres, is yet at heart One who numbers the very hairs of our head and cares even for the fallen sparrow. It is not easy to hold these two together—the vastness and the personality: but the spirit is measured in terms not of immensity but of intensity, and it is on the deep intensity of a Father's heart that we would fain fling ourselves, and it is of the very core of the Gospel that we cannot do so in vain.

IX

PROPITIATION

YOUR sister's question is one which I have asked myself many times in the past and hence, though my answer may be very faulty, I can at least catch the same angle of view. "If God is our Father, is He not utterly willing and able to forgive, and if so, if this has always been so, why the further need of the sacrifice of Christ?" Of course, Stephen, this may prove to be one of the many questions we must ask and to which we must be content to receive no answer. One must start very humbly, therefore, recognising how limited our knowledge is, how faulty the organ with which we try to gauge the mysteries of the divine; but to stop here would be cowardice. I cannot take Arden's point of view that we must merely accept dogma without further questions; it implies mental bankruptcy, and God demands of us worship with our whole being, mind no less than spirit.

Jesus Christ, I take it, was the great revealer of His Father, and we stand on firm ground when we assure ourselves that God's action is always that of the perfect Father, and we have the right of appeal to that verdict beyond all cavilling.

To the question: "Is not God utterly willing and

able to forgive sin ? ” My whole soul answers “ Yes.” This is what the Son of God came to tell us, and He died in the telling. But let us go back a little for the whole question of propitiation is at stake. Just what does it mean ? Now I am no theologian, and my knowledge of comparative religions is not very great ; but so far as one understands the matter it is like this. Going back into the dim beginning of things one nearly always finds that the spirit of approach to a higher Being is that of Browning’s “ Caliban.” Man either makes his god in his own image—violent, tyrannical, jealous—or he is conscious that the path of approach is blocked by his own imperfection ; the gulf between is so immense, and he sees no way of bridging it over. Probably these are two stages in man’s thought about God, and to a large extent their dominant feature is fear. There is that within him which makes an approach to God desirable ; and at the same time there is the crouching fear of the unenlightened soul which makes the only way of approach one of propitiation. At all costs he must appease and propitiate this pitiless, all-seeing divine Being. And so I take it in every religion which man has evolved, or found somehow waiting for him, propitiation plays an immense part.

Now this may very well be taken in two ways : it may mean that such an act is essential to all true religion ; that its universality proves its necessity, its innate truth in the region of thought and action. On the other hand, it may be just the human element which clouds true faith, a mighty repression, as the psycho-analysist would say, causing faith and religion to be imperfect and hiding their simplicity. Certainly experience shows that it has often acted thus, and so been a deterrent to a finer faith, characterised by that perfect love which casts out fear.

When we turn to the New Testament, to the writings of St. Paul or St. John, we have always to remember we are dealing with thought in the process of being made. The new day had dawned, but the new thought which that day involved was yet in a condition of flux. It is very difficult, I mean, to distinguish, more especially in St. Paul, just how much is Jewish thought, how much Christian. Saul the Jew is evolving into Paul the Christian, but however great and inspired his personality, I imagine he developed along human lines, and the Christian spirit had again and again to cope with the strong Jewish tendencies of his up-bringing; only a spiritual genius like St. Paul could have broken with them as he did.

It is always a little misleading to quote texts apart from their context, but there certainly seems a big gap between such a verse as the following: "He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"; and this other in the same chapter: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself not imputing their trespasses to them." The first is Christianity of a distinctly Jewish flavour, the latter, if one may isolate it, which frankly I think doubtful, stands on an altogether different level. There is, to begin with, no hint of propitiating God; on the contrary it is the world which has to be reconciled to Him, reconciled in mind as well as spirit; and this I think, Stephen, God achieved by sending One who should reveal in human nature, just what God is like. Might we not say this is the very gist of at-one-ment, the reconciling the world to God, showing the divine love in such a form, love even unto death—that men's minds are rid of their repressions, and their hearts are stirred into a

white passion of love, and so loving are made clean, and effectively immune to sin.

To return to St. Paul, which of these two verses represent his exact thought, possibly neither, possibly his mind in the process of being evolved moved between the two extremes, one definitely Jewish, the other a more definitely Christian type ; half-way betwixt these two extremes we find the more mystical philosophic conception, which probably marked the Apostle's general conclusion. It is founded on our organic unity with Christ. As he sees it, Christ is the great representative of the race, and what He did, the whole race potentially fulfilled. Christ died for sin, we also died with Him ; the reality of this we make our own by an act of faith. There is little in common between this idea, and the more crude doctrines of substitution, and the punishment of one man instead of another. No ! it is a mystical uplifting of the race, potentially achieved in the One who represented that race, and actually achieved by the individual in life and faith.

But is there not a flaw here, a flaw which St. Paul seems to avoid in his highest utterance ? He is thinking undoubtedly of family life, and of that life as an organic whole. God is the Father, Christ is the eldest Son and Representative and the honour of the family, so to speak, lies in His hands ; but the flaw as I see it lies in reasoning from the less to the greater, from a human, and especially Roman, ideal of family life, to the Divine. For in the household of God we are shown family life on the Divine scale ; perhaps only very dimly can we glimpse that scale in our best moments, but when it comes it is a vision of spontaneity and all sufficingness that we see, and the thought of legal contrivance or

transaction of what nature soever somehow leaves us cold ; we have been lifted into an altogether different atmosphere.

You will say that in other words I do not hold the Atonement to be in any sense a transaction, or propitiatory act between man and God. No ! I'm not prepared to say that. St. Paul seems to range, as I have tried to show you, from the purely Jewish up to that less common element in his writings, where his sense of the divine love out-ranges all thought of propitiation.

Now, for myself, I am doubtful whether on God's side an act of propitiation is needful. I find it hard to believe that Divine Love cannot forgive freely and unconditionally. That propitiation should be necessary to vindicate the moral law seems to me only a kind of quibble.

But what if such a propitiation be needful, not on God's part, but man's ; what if there be some fundamental human instinct, which makes man hunger to atone to God, to make reparation for the evil in the world ; and that Jesus Christ satisfied and completely fulfilled this instinct, making reparation on man's behalf for the racial sin of disobedience, by his own obedience and death ! It might well be so. If propitiation is indeed needful, then, I take it, it is in some such sense as this ; man's consciousness of wrong is so great he simply must make atonement, and he finds that atonement in the perfect life of Christ, one like himself and of his own race has made it.

Others will fall back on a more simple faith still, and see in the death of Jesus, the supreme revelation of the love of the Father, see it as an altar fire, a revealing, in time, of a process continuously working in the timeless region ; God suffering in and for humanity, till the great

work of redemption is fully accomplished and love has its perfect reward.

May this not be a more final development in the evolution of man's idea of propitiation? Ah, surely it lifts one on to a higher plane altogether, if one can think of God thus, suffering in and for man, sharing his every pang, feeling the stain of his every sin, each vibration of the circumference reaching back to the centre; and throughout loving as only the Divine can love. It is of the very heart of my own faith that there is such love, and to know this in the utmost depths of our experience is, I take it, the one only solvent for sin; sin simply cannot live in the blaze of that pure vision.

Tell your sister just so much of this as will help her; she is surely right in believing that the Father of us all forgives freely and absolutely when we ask Him.

X

DIVINE FORGIVENESS

So you sent my letter on propitiation direct to your sister, and wonder if I mind ! Certainly not, I am delighted if it proved helpful.

How divinely beautiful forgiveness is, Stephen, and what an ugly thing men have made of it with their cut-and-dried theories ! ponderous devices of Roman legalism ; plans of salvation—the expression of man's capacity to scheme and shape and formulate, good in itself, but bad when it checks the limitless flow of the divine.

You remember Whittier's words with their fine spiritual scorn, if one may apply so strong a word to so gentle a Seer :

“ Who fathoms the Eternal Thought ?
Who talks of scheme and plan ?
The Lord is God ! He needeth not
The poor device of man.”

The gist of the matter is ever the same. We cannot rest until we have depicted God in the lineaments of our faulty selves. Forgiveness is too large a thing for us to grasp, we find it hard to accept the divine generosity, and so we hedge it around, lest it prove too ideal, and seem to make light of sin, by showing a tenderness to the sinner which runs counter to our moral sense. For

myself, this moral difficulty, the spiritual equation of sin and its offset, can only be solved by a deeper apprehension of the positive force of love.

There is a vision of the character of God in some of the sayings of Jesus, which I think possibly escapes our gaze, and most of us have failed to recognise its force and meaning, since the literalism of our minds tends to rob us of many of the beauties, the delicate nuances so to speak, of the Gospel records.

The writer of St. John's Gospel puts a trenchant phrase into the mouth of Jesus : " The Son," he says, " can do nothing of Himself, but what he seeth the Father do." Now if this be true, and instinctively we feel its truth, we feel that the Son did do what He beheld His Father doing, that His life did mirror the eternal for us. Well, I say, Stephen, if it be indeed true that He spoke thus, I imagine that it follows that the *other* sons are told to do nothing which the Father Himself is not doing. If I am told to resist not evil . . . to turn the other cheek, then it follows, so my faulty reason assures me, that God Himself does not resist evil, does turn the other cheek, and let these feeble wills of ours buffet Him to the utmost of their desire. This is one of those side-lights on the Gospel story, which, as I have said, seems to have escaped observation.

The might of force is surely not the might of Heaven ! It is man's folly to think it such. Christ showed us another might, the indomitable might of love, love which never tires, which never turns aside, which will endure the utmost Calvary, and which will win by the sheer force of love—or fail ; and I take it that to win otherwise would be failure, if, as I tend to think, force is in reality but the human shadow thrown by this divine pertinacity.

In those great words about non-resistance, I hold, then, that Jesus gave not only a command to His disciples, but also the glimpse of an eternal principle derived from God Himself, and fulfilled in Him alone ; and that forgiveness illimitable, and beyond all definition, is the very expression of His nature in its reaction upon a guilty world.

It is in truth we ourselves who cannot receive this forgiveness. Blind with excess of light, our souls refuse to take hold of it. It is so big, so wonderful, that a man's heart must become pure to grasp it, yet is it ours unconditionally could we but see.

If we need confirmation of this fact we shall find it, I think, on the height of Calvary. The revelation of the Cross of Christ, whatever else its implications, is the vision of the Incarnate Son of God involved in the tremendous coil of man's sin, not resisting the evil, turning the other cheek, loving him unto death, and in so doing revealing the heart of God. And isn't it a fact, Stephen, that when first we see that love, we begin at length to understand what forgiveness means, and, moreover, what it costs to forgive? The Evangelical has been right all along in affirming this latter truth, but he has been wrong when he has made man, not God, pay the price, when he has divorced Father and Son, and driven in an artificial wedge between the divine justice and the divine love, failing to see that they are the reverse sides of one coin, that only the wholly loving can be the wholly just. It is by means of the divine justice seen *in* the love that the soul is purified, the moral sense strengthened, and evil begins to drop away, but I have spoken of this before.

And, mark you, all that the Bible says of

the wrath of God against sin is utterly true. How can light but hate darkness ! and the punishment of sin remains, only I believe the gist of that punishment lies, apart from the consequence of our infringement of natural law, in this incapacity to receive the love of God, until our wills desire to turn Godwards. Till then we are buffeting against it in blind resistance, and the Christ is being ever and again re-crucified. He hangs silent, our victim ; yet must we dare to believe He shall, at length, see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

Tell me if you feel the truth of what I have said. Is this sublime passivity of God a fantasy or is it simply true ? At first sight there are many words, even deeds assigned to the Christ, which seem to contradict it, but it may be the apparent contradiction of a larger paradox.

“ If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses ! ”

Did Jesus say these words exactly as they are recorded ? They seem almost an *argumentum ad hominem*, but granted He did, we must read His words in the light of His action ; and in the Cross we discover an all-availing clue. Hence, I take it, that what underlies such utterances as this is only, as we have seen, that until we forgive we cannot grasp the unfailing forgiveness which is ours, just as my kodak is incapable of taking a true picture until it is in focus.

There is again that dramatic picture of force, the cleansing of the Temple. Never for a moment do we doubt that Jesus feels and expresses righteous anger, but that anger, however forcible, does not, I believe militate against the eternal unwavering process of divine forgiveness, it is in relation to that fact, what the fierce crested wave is to the perfect stillness of the deep sea.

No ! I can conceive of neither word nor act of the Master which runs contrary to the vision of the Cross, in its splendid drama of non-resistance. In it, God has turned the other cheek, and has revealed to faithless man the one dynamic of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I came across some wonderful lines by Stephen Phillips recently, I hope you may not know them, for the sheer joy of quoting them.

“ When Jesus greeted Joan in the after-twilight ;
When the Crucified kissed the Burned ;
Then softly they spake together, solemnly, sweetly,
They two so branded with life,
But they spoke not at all of the Cross, or of up-piled flaming,
Or the going from them of God,
But he was tender over the soul of the Roman
Who yielded him up to the Priest ;
And she was whist with pity for him that lighted
The faggot in Rouen town.”

Jesus Christ and Joan of Arc mirroring forth the eternal compassion and forgiveness ! It seems to me a great conception, the vision of a true poet.

XI

IMMORTALITY

AT Easter-time one finds oneself thinking about the whole problem of Immortality. It is so complex, and in our weaker moments so open to attack. I suppose there was never a time in history when the desire to know was stronger. Death has been rampant to an unparalleled degree, and we ask ourselves again and again : " Can we be certain of a future life, or is it only the will to live which kindles and quickens our desires and makes us the dupes of our own imagination ?

Faith, of course, has her own answer, she stands impregnable, four-square to every wind that blows. But there are our bad hours, when even faith herself fails, when we cry : " Is she, too, a dupe ? Do not science and reason give a very different answer ? " You remember we discussed this when we were together last summer.

Well, for myself, I would start by trying to combat a very common error, that of pitting reason against intuition or faith, of dividing man's being into varying faculties, and making one faculty the sole pilot of the whole. It is just this habit of mind which leads to shipwreck. Man's intellect, will and emotions are not all kept apart in water-tight compartments ; each, to change

my metaphor, with its own separate work to accomplish ; they are rather part and parcel of the single soul of the man who at once thinks, wills, and loves.

To grasp this is, I am convinced, an essential factor in right thinking. It is the response the whole man makes to stimuli—which we have to deal with—and not merely the response of this or that faculty of his nature. True, the intellect to some extent acts as umpire, sums up the evidence, and pronounces how far it is verifiable. But the intellect, as I see it, must deal not only with rational thought, but with the whole complex machinery of man's nature and its bearings upon the point.

The scientific objection to a future life is founded upon a materialistic theory, which identifies brain and mind, and teaches us that thought and consciousness are the phenomena of cerebral changes. This may be so, on the other hand, there is, I fancy, a growing doubt as to the validity of this apparently self-evident explanation. It has always seemed to me, indeed, just as reasonable to say that the music lies in the wires of the piano, rather than in the soul of the man who controls and adjusts, and guides into harmony, the vibrations of those wires, as to say that thought has its ultimate explanation in the movements of the brain tissue, and the soul of man can be accounted for by chemical changes. Bergson, to quote but one modern thinker, holds that the brain is the instrument of mind, an instrument, moreover, not so much to express mind, as to act as a central telephonic office to the thinking soul, which shall allow only that amount of mind or memory to pass through as shall be advantageous to life. Granted the truth of this, that the soul or mind is greater than its instrument ; it does not seem impossible to think of it, as existing apart from its instrument or

creating a new and more perfect organ of expression, according to its needs.

Hence, I think, the rational argument for immortality is by no means wholly negative. If we must write against it non-proven, we have yet to assure ourselves it is dis-proven. Science has by no means said her last word on the subject, and the tendency of modern scientific studies, is surely to become less and less materialistic every decade ; matter thins down, mind increases her momentum.

But as I have said, the question is far too big for science alone to solve. Reason must combine with man's other faculties, and it is upon the growing volume of conviction that we should ground our faith. Take for example, Stephen, the whole process of evolution. Has nature toiled and laboured and wrestled, only to turn out as her chief achievement, a being of insatiable desires, of a capacity for happiness which is infinite ; and a means of satisfying these desires which is at the mercy of every passing accident, capable of destruction by the minutest germ, invisible to the naked eye ? The idea seems absurd. It is true that the process of evolution is strewn with wrecks, but through the wreckage we glimpse a purpose, the forward movement goes on ; nature achieves her end for the moment. Are we to think that after creating mind and soul and aspiration, God has made these dependent on the chemical changes of a perishing body ? The whole argument appears to me ludicrous. That the higher should perish with the lower is against the analogy of all life and the tendency of all sane thought.

You remember Browning's lines in "Cleon" ?

" I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
 The man who loved his life so over-much,
 Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,
 I dare at times imagine to my need
 Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
 Unlimited in capability
 For joy, as this is in desire for joy—
 To seek which the joy-hunger forces us :
 That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait
 On purpose to make prized the life at large—
 Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
 We burst there as the worm into the fly,
 Who while a worm still, wants his wings."

Well, this seems to be true, and leads me on to the point I have in view, namely the *moral* quality of life. It is on this principally that, apart from revelation, I would build my own argument for a future existence. If our life were merely that of the animal—eating, drinking, sleeping, fighting—then one might well ask: "What need to prolong it? Let the animal instincts and enjoyments perish with the animal frame." But though it is true that with a proportion of mankind life may seem to be little more, yet man as a whole is conscious of a life of a quality far beyond mere animalism; a life of active thought, tender affection, noble self-sacrifice. It is not so much what he is, as what he desires to be, the aim and ends he sets before him, the undying aspiration of his soul.

Can we then really believe that God has taken æons of time to evolve such aims and aspirations, only to scrap them when they come; or at least allow them a pitiful moment in time to display themselves, before they vanish to be seen no more? I, for one, cannot believe it. One feels the force of the argument in the simple lines of Lucy Larcon's poem, "Immortal":

“ I dare to say unto Thee, My God,
Who hast made me *climb so high*,
That I shall not crumple away with the clod ;
I am Thine, and I cannot die ! ”

If it be true of the average man, that such moral greatness, in however embryo a condition, has an element in it which we feel is imperishable, how much more is this so in the case of the great saint, the patriarch, the martyr to a forlorn cause !

No, indeed, it is not the wreckage of evolution which points the moral and glimpses the purport of the whole, it is rather the end and aim, it is man at his highest—“ See the Christ stand ! ” Surely this is the basis of His own words, “ I am the Resurrection and the Life ”—‘ because my life contains the undying quality, and all who have such life are immortal together with me.’ It is of the very essence of my own assurance that this is so.

Immortality may or may not be scientifically demonstrable, but the witness of man’s whole nature, the purpose and aim of his life, the thing the soul within him is trying to utter, are to my thinking unmistakable. Reason alone may not give us the answer, but reason can call in the other faculties of the human soul and sum up their evidence, and personally I have little doubt what the verdict will be. I like to feel you will agree with me.

All this is very sketchy, however, it may interest you ; and for myself as I walk the country lanes this Eastertide and gaze on their budding beauty, and promise of coming fulfilment, it is with a growing sense, that if my hope is not technically rational, it is at least not irrational, for it is the expression of the larger reason which lies within me, which is part and parcel of my whole soul’s content.

XII

THE TRINITY

TRINITY Sunday and the creed of St. Athanasius—which, by the by, was not written by St. Athanasius, but by Hilary of Arles or some other worthy, and re-edited at that—always give me to think. With regard to the former we are apt to drop into heresy, and become to all intents and purposes Tritheists, when we believed ourselves of the inmost sect of the orthodox ; and with regard to the latter, however valuable it be as a Church document, there is, to my thinking, a seriously faulty emphasis.

“ He therefore that will be saved ”—or be in a state of spiritual health, “ must thus think of the Trinity.” But if I have in any way read my Gospels rightly, Jesus Christ came not to teach men to think correctly but to live correctly. The revelation He gave was a revelation how to live. He came to save men’s souls and not primarily their minds.

The creeds are invaluable as an expression of a man’s beliefs, and the Church’s belief, about God ; but to say that a man cannot be in a state of salvation unless he think correctly on so deep a matter as the nature of God Himself, to put right thinking before right living, to put orthodoxy before the soul’s experience of Jesus Christ, seems to me a strange inversion of the truth ; and I find

myself at issue with Hilary of Arles, or whoever the writer be, on profoundest fundamentals. It matters little to me how far the philosophy of the creed be accurately thought out, and even here there may be room for a note of query, that one sweeping assertion for myself spoils the whole. It takes us down that *descensus Averni* which has led to inquisitions and heresy hunts in every age, which has transmuted the simplicity of the gospel into the wrangles of the Schoolmen.

For myself I honour the reciting of a creed, if it be simple and true, it is like saluting the colours or any other transcendental act of symbolism, and appeals to a genuine human instinct ; but a creed surely fails in its object if it be made a test whereby we are to unchurch our brother. Orthodoxy, if it is to carry with it the hall-mark of the Christ who supped with publican and sinner, and chose out for commendation Samaritan and outsider, must be inclusive, not exclusive, and the function of the Church with her objective witness to truth, is to hold out the arms of inclusion : to say to her children, " You have the privilege and right to claim your place in the society of those whom Christ redeemed."

I did not begin my letter, however, to dogmatise about creeds, but I think a plain man may help other plain men, when he upholds the freedom of the gospel of Christ as against the bias of logician and schoolman, however learned ; and asserts that the man who has known Jesus Christ in the depths of his own soul need not be over-anxious, because the doctrine of the Trinity which Augustine himself, if legend speak truly, found a hard nut to crack, is a problem too abstruse to venture an opinion upon.

Yet think, what doughty champions have upheld

the truth which Trinity Sunday stands for, as against Theist on the one hand and Tritheist on the other. I have been wondering much of late whether there is no train of thought, no mind-frame, capable of somehow harmonising these two extremes, and bridging them over ; so that, to change one's metaphor, Theist may blossom into something akin to Trinitarianism and Tritheist merge back into the sole splendour of Theism, without losing his own glimpse of truth. Is there a sense in which God is indeed a single Unity in the meaning of the Unitarian and Theist, and yet a further sense, in which the Church which through the ages has proclaimed the three Persons in one Godhead, speaks wisely and holds our allegiance ; so that, as it were, these two conceptions may be the contradictory truths of the great paradox of the divine Nature, in so far as man may dare reverently to seek to understand it ? I have sometimes thought this might be the case, and am venturing to talk it out with you, in the hope that you may sympathise, and tell me whether such a train of thought might help others, and tend to show how paradoxical all truth is, so that in a measure we are getting nearer to the centre of things when we appear to contradict each other most.

To return to Trinity Sunday. I think it was F. D. Maurice who said that the very nature of God as love involved the doctrine of the Trinity, since love implies both a subject loving and an object loved, and a spirit passing betwixt subject and object. Now there is a great deal to be said for that, and I have always felt the force of his argument. None the less there seems to me just one weak point. We are arguing as so often from our knowledge of the human to that of the divine. " A man is only loving if he has that whereon to expend his love ! "

This may be true of men ; is it necessarily so of God ? I do not agree with Dean Mansel that human and divine values may be wholly different, for, in that case, we should have no real standard of morality. No ! all that is best in us is such because it is derived from God, and He is like that only more so ; mark that little word *only*, Stephen, for it implies that we must not interpret God in terms of man, but man in terms of God, hence, again, I think we have erred through an inversion of thought.

Now man loves ; a power within him impels him to love, but God not only loves, there is more in it than this. He *is* love, the source of all derivative loves, love essential and original ; and there seems to me to be a real difference between love which is static, the originating love, and love which is dynamic, the acting love. Man can only be the latter so far as we can see ; he cannot really love apart from action. God, I dare very humbly to believe, may be both. He may be an originating essence of love, prior to any act of loving on His part. Isn't it interesting to notice in nature how intensity is always motionless ? The waves are ever moving on the surface, but the depths are utterly still ; the flame is ever flickering in the fire, but the heart of the furnace is a still white heat ; the ray of light reveals itself in manifold colours, but in its essence it is one and colourless. I like myself to feel that these natural phenomena are analogies of higher things, nature-prophecies of God Himself.

I imagine this self-originating love must always, however, become active ; it can only satisfy itself by so doing, and hence God not only is love, but acts—that is, loves. His essence is prior to His action, not necessarily in time ; the two processes may be eternally parallel, stillness in the deep, movement on the surface ; when one thinks of God's

static love, we see a Trinity of Persons (*personae* characters) not in distinction, but as colour is potentially in the white ray of light. When, on the other hand, we think of God's love in action, we see a Trinity of Persons, an eternal subject and object of reciprocal love.

Is it quite impossible that we have here the link between these two apparently contradictory truths, a bridge of thought which neither Theist or Trinitarian need refute? Truth is a diamond of many facets and it is the angle of perception which matters. The Theist is right when he speaks of one only God whom he worships; we have a mind-frame which covers his experience, we only ask him not to stop there, to follow us a little further and to see in his truth the potentiality which makes for the Trinitarian vision. May we not say then that God unmanifest is a Unity, and God manifest a Trinity? If our minds can hold these two thoughts, we get nearer perhaps to comprehending the paradox of the divine nature, than by holding either alone. Theism as a creed alone denies the divinity of Christ, denies there has been an eternal expression or utterance of God, which became partially manifest in all men, supremely so in Jesus. Trinitarianism seen apart from its Theistic basis almost surely spells Tritheism—three Gods not one, which is a heresy no less than Unitarianism.

I wonder, Stephen, just what St. Paul's point of view was? By birth he was a Monotheist, but his experience of Christ blossomed out into a Christology of the highest significance. Is it possible that we may find that in his teaching also there is a bridge whereby Theist and Trinitarian may link up, a common meeting-place so to speak? In reading St. Paul the great conception of the person of Christ which one gains is always mediatorial. I'm not

sure whether he ever uses the word God of Jesus, but constantly Lord and Christ, and most especially is He the Mediator, the One who stands between God and man, "the image of the invisible God and the First-born": or germinal idea: "of creation." Even in that fine passage Phil. ii, 5-10, where St. Paul definitely speaks of Him as in the form of God, he yet at the same time seems to represent Him as standing on the rung of a ladder, from which He can reach up to perfect equality with God, this being His by right of generation, or reach down to perfect equality with man, He being man's original ideal. Again the Apostle distinctly speaks in I Cor. xv, 28, of the time when this mediatorial work shall be ended, and the Son yield up the Kingdom to the Father that God may be all in all. All of which suggests that to St. Paul, too, basically considered, Almighty God in His original essence is One and Sole. Made manifest in His act of loving, God is the Father of Jesus Christ, and Jesus the eternal Son. One wonders just what this means to the man in the street, the plain man who is asking for plain, simple facts. Precious little, dear Stephen, he is wise enough to know his own limitations, to be aware that his finite brain can never gauge the ultimate reality of things, and it is for the tangible and practical his soul is asking. Well, I believe, it is not by the metaphysics of St. Athanasius that the doctrine of Trinity Sunday will justify itself, but in the last resort, in this very region of what is tangible and practical. The man who has found salvation through Jesus Christ may be the strictest Monotheist, yet none the less he feels that there is a divinely human Son of God, for him at least and for others like him, and he is conscious of the working within his soul of the Spirit or influence or whatever he may name it

of that Son ; and hence, in a threefold experience, he understands at least with the heart what the Trinitarian bids him accept with the brain, and so he has come by way of experience very close to that paradox of which I have been talking. I should much like in your next letter some strong helpful criticism. Don't hesitate to tell me if I am altogether out of my depth.

XIII

SACRAMENTS

I HAD a little surprise gift the other day of a box of bulbs, a special kind of lily, whereby hangs a tale. The original bulbs were planted by my old friend Frank Darrell in his garden at X. When he went out to India, I rented the house from him, and as you will remember my mother spent her last days with me there. On Frank's death his sister inherited the property, and has now sent me these bulbs that my garden at Heathercombe may contain something that links it up with the past. ✓

How easily the tiniest thing in nature, Stephen, may become sacramental, an outward and visible symbol of deepest realities—love, friendship, joy, sorrow herself, misted over with a pearly sheen! This is specially so as one grows older and memory tends to play a greater part in life than anticipation.

I often think one hardly realises how deeply this sacramental system is embedded in life. "Two only, as generally necessary to salvation," says our catechism with a larger charity than some of its exponents, who omit the word "generally" and shake their heads sadly over the fate of Mystic or Quaker, who have either outgrown sacraments, or failed to see their worth, because the inner light gleams clear to them unmediated.

For what essentially is a sacrament ? Is it not the mating of matter with spirit, a revelation of the true meaning of matter in terms of its highest values ? Matter linked with life is a primary lesson of the evolutionist ; matter linked with spirit is a primary lesson of the sacramentalist.

Spirit embodied in form comes to man embodied in form, and they twain are one. I feel sure you will agree with me that this does not mean that man can only receive spiritual help and life through a sacrament ; but that it rather means because man is embodied and because form and outward substance play a great part in his life, it is probably easier for him to receive the grace of God also through form, the form is to him a symbol, a mind-picture, and, moreover, a sure means of receiving the invisible and formless. Is not the Incarnation the supreme sacrament in this sense, that in the Man Jesus Christ, the formless and invisible God was able to manifest Himself ? “ That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of Life ! ” Hence the high Churchman is surely right when he speaks of the sacrament as an extension of the Incarnation, but no less wrong when he uses the sacraments of Christ to limit the grace of Christ.

Truly we abrogate to ourselves an authority which the Master never gave us when, in using the means of grace He Himself has appointed, we limit His grace to those means. Because He has said : “ Along that channel grace shall flow,” it does not follow that grace may not be found elsewhere. The water-shed whence the channel flows is too mighty for that. But it holds good, none the less, that for the normal man the words “ generally necessary for salvation ” are profoundly true,

and only he may dare to set them aside who has so realised Christ otherwise, that he knows with that intuition which is more than knowledge, that for him there is a direct approach unmediated by normal means, for the sacrament however divinely appointed is a means to a definite end : it was made for man, just as Christ declared the Sabbath to be.

Hence, if one tries to define, may we not use the definition of the Christian Church, and yet again that of the Christian philosopher ? The Church gives us her vision of truth, the philosopher takes that truth and expands its underlying principles : A Sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself," that is the practical truth for the Christian Church—the laver of baptism with all its lovely symbolism, and the bread broken and the wine poured out, strangely stirring and dramatic picture of the One whose life was broken and blood poured out for us.

"But," says the philosopher, "may I not also ask what is the underlying principle of a sacrament ? Is it not that it focusses for us the universal, that if the Divine Presence is found within the sacrament, it is not because it is absent elsewhere, but because in the sacrament the universal Presence is so focussed that we may realise it ? The special does not deny the universal, it only supremely affirms it—don't you think so ? If one meal is a sacrament of Christ's presence, then every meal should be made and become a Eucharist. In saying this we do not lessen the dignity of the divine command, we rather seek to understand it, to see dimly the glory it suggests. But just because man is frail and faulty, and the common meal remains so often common unmediated, we under-

stand the wisdom which so consecrates one meal, that heart and soul may be uplifted and strengthened, and a man's communions be made, as they should be, milestones on his spiritual pilgrimage.

I take it, moreover, that this principle is capable of endless extension. We observe one day in seven as sacred, not because other days are secular, but in order to focus the truth, that all our time, all our interests are sacred, and to be used for the glory of God, and unless we understand this clearly, unless we go forth from the special means determined to carry its truth with us into the universal, determined so far as in us lies to let all our time be God's, all our meals Eucharists, all our visions of beauty sacramental truths—we have failed to learn our Father's lesson, and our sacraments have only partially availed us. Think for a moment of those wondrous hours on the mountain top with the stars and the glory of an Eastern sky as visible symbols of the presence of God! Did Jesus ever pray such prayers, as He uttered then, in Jewish synagogue and in the company of priest and Pharisee? but I am treading on very sacred ground. . . .

I would, myself, learn to love my Eucharists and Sabbath rest, just in so far as they teach me this, and it is because men like Whittier and others of a like mind have somehow reached this truth, apart from its special manifestation, that they really, in the deepest meaning of the word, are disciples of Jesus in His sacramental system.

Tell me if you think I am right, or do I take too much for granted? I have felt in the poems of Whittier,¹ for example, the utterance of a true sacramentalist and have

¹ Cf. Whittier's poems with those of Faber,

been conscious that he and the mystic Catholic are, at least, very near akin. He himself wrote: "To me Quaker and Catholic are alike, both children of my Heavenly Father, and separated only by a creed—to some, indeed, a barrier like a Chinese wall, but to me, frail and slight as a spider's web."

I have gone very far afield from my box of bulbs, and that reminds me that they are not yet planted, so no more to-night.

XIV

DEATH

My old friend Mrs. Dunne is dying. It is a pathetic vision, this of the soul cutting loose its bearings, and starting in lonely grandeur upon an unknown voyage. She and Colonel Dunne, as you will remember, kept their golden wedding a few months ago, and the shades have closed in swiftly in the interim. The Colonel is just himself, the wrench is enormous, and the pathos of the thing wrings one's heart, but to go into the Hall brings no sense of dreary anticipation or morbid unreality. Colonel Dunne greets one with the same perfect simplicity of pose as usual, talks gently and very naturally of his dear one, passes on to the topics of the day, and then takes you to see his roses and delphiniums, which are even finer than usual this year, till the pall of self-consciousness one almost instinctively put on, in visiting the house of death, vanishes before a vision of perfect naturalness. That's rather grand, isn't it? I rarely have felt death's approach more beautiful.

Mrs. Burt, the Vicar's wife is troubled. "It is so strange," murmurs the poor lady with a bewildered look, "death is such a terribly solemn thing, and to go about as though nothing were happening . . ."

I mentioned a recent air accident, and how one man was rescued quietly smoking a cigarette.

"Horrid!" said Mrs. Burt.

"I don't think you quite see my point," I remarked gently.

"Horrid!" she reiterated.

Then I was silent, there was no more to be said. But the whole thing has set me thinking. How rapidly, Stephen, our sense of values is altering! It is but the other day that we welcomed the angel of death with mutes, and hearses with nodding plumes. Nineteen centuries before Jesus Christ had looked on death with the deep insight of one who knew, and declared it to be as a sleep, but few heard or heeded.

I have in my mind's eyes as I write two pictures, the one is the aisle of say Bath Abbey, with its kaleidoscope of hideous mural tablets, the other the sanctuary of a tiny village church I wot of, with its simple oblong cross, the name of a young soldier, and the date of the action in which he was killed, and below these lives from Stevenson's Requiem.

"Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will."

To me it is sheer pain to experience the formal death-welcoming aspect which conventionality assumes, with its lowered unnatural voice, rigid self-conscious pose, heathenish black, and terrible trappings. Yes, I know that death is a very solemn guest, that eternity is a big thing, man such an atom in immensity, but it's just the *smallness* of the whole conception one hates, its heart-sickening conventionality, and lack of reality.

If men meet death smiling, to-day, it is not for the

most part as poor Mrs. Burt assumes, due to callousness, it is the sheer hatred of pose ; they won't allow their souls to gesture face to face with death, they will at least be themselves. They feel with Browning: "I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and bade me creep past."

Now don't you think this stark sincerity is very fine ? It may not be religion, but it is a thing the Maker of us all surely respects, for He is absolutely sincere Himself.

Further, much of our conventional treatment of death is the outcome of incomplete thinking.

"Death is so solemn !" as Mrs. Burt affirms.

"Yes ! but so is life."

To go alone into eternity. . . .

"But are we not even now alone in eternity ? Is not each moment I draw my breath an eternal fact ? "

Surely, had we only imagination, we should see the majesty of life itself, the bigness of the whole thing, and so learn to see death as an incident in that life, as science and religion teach us. It is not until this becomes part and parcel of the very fibre of our conviction, that conventional unrealities will cease, we shall feel the solemnity of the soul's long voyage no less because we are simple and natural.

To make a cult of death is morbid, to smile face to face with death, as we smile face to face with life is logical—either God is in all our thoughts, that is as a fundamental issue, or He is not, in which latter case the pose is only unreal. It is true, of course, as you will naturally point out, that there are times when the big truths of life come home more forcibly to us, and of them surely death is the greatest. We cannot live either

emotionally or intellectually on the heights always, hence it befits us to approach the large issues in a reverent spirit. Yes, indeed, and this is the complementary truth to my own, none the less I believe, that to be perfectly natural, simple, and real, is the finest tribute we can pay to the Father of our souls in the big moments of life. To the young dauntless soul, accustomed to look danger in the face with a smile, it may not be incongruous to stand face to face with eternity, cigarette in mouth, it is part of the fearless simplicity of his being, he will not stop to think about self, even in the act of approaching death, Oh! we who condemn, would we could see the splendour of the thing, not the supposed callousness, but the fine forgetfulness of self, in a sense the perfection of good manners.

We others may not reach that quiet simplicity, but we can at least let go our pose and artificiality, we can rid the trappings of death of this hideous, unchristian gloom, and like my old friend Colonel Dunne, perfect gentleman that he is, we can walk simply along the path which brings our beloved to Jordan's bank.

You remember that fine passage of Donald Hankey's—"Portentous solemn death you looked a fool when you tackled one of them! Life, they did not value life! They had never been able to make much of a fist of it. But if they lived amiss, they died gloriously, with a smile for the pain and the dread of it. What else had they been born for? It was their chance. With a gay heart they gave their greatest gift. One by one death challenged them, one by one they smiled in his face, and refused to be dismayed. They had been lost, but they had found the way home, and when at last they laid their lives at

the feet of the Good Shepherd, what could they do but smile ? ”

Great—very great—I can’t write more, dear Stephen, to-night.

XV

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

ARDEN and I have been having a good bout of arms over the much vexed question of eternal punishment, if one may venture to use the word bout of a subject so tremendous. As a doctor he is naturally influenced by his study of science.

"Look at the evolution of life," he remarked, "the path is strewn with wreckage all the way along, relics of failure and weakness, of the fatal results of indetermina-tion. Or take again my own profession, the growth of a cancer for example. We doctors don't know the cause; it may be a piece of tissue starting to develop on its own in defiance, so to speak, of the laws of the rest of the organ-ism; anyhow, we know the result—destruction and death."

"I don't think your analogies hold good," I replied somewhat feebly.

He went on then to back up his contention with texts. He has a slight weakness for the text apart from the context, which sometimes mars his argument, though it is essentially true that there are many verses in the Bible which give us gravely to think; they can only be understood in the light of the books as a whole, and of the growing vision of God which emerges out of them.

"Take again, those words of our Lord's," Arden continued, as he stooped to relight his pipe, "'Enter ye in at the strait gate . . . because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it' . . . not only are they analogous in spirit, with the witness of science, but they give us the Master's own verdict upon the problem."

But here I entered a hearty protest. Arden, in his zeal for proof, was going too far.

"Nothing of the kind," I exclaimed. "The two experiences may be similar I grant you that, but to say, as people often do, that Christ is here declaring that there will be few finally saved, is to misunderstand the passage entirely. Why man," I said, "if it were true, and you and I really believed it, we should shut our Bibles with a sickening sense of failure and say like Wordsworth :

"Great God ! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn' . . .

than believe anything of the sort."

"In reality," I went on, "there is not a word about final conditions in the whole utterance. It is a wisely austere declaration that the way to life is hard ; and as Jesus saw it then it was the few who were choosing it. This is a most sure fact of observation, but an entirely different thing from any declaration as to the resources of divine love and power for the final salvation of souls."

Arden was silent for a moment, and then : "You'll find the old Book too much for you," he remarked drily.

"And you'll find you can't use the Book to libel the character of its supreme Author," I retorted. Then I felt a bit ashamed of myself, for one doesn't help on the Kingdom of God by getting hot over it.

"Sorry, old man," I said, and we both laughed as we puffed away at our pipes.

I am much inclined to think that the controversy has entirely shifted its ground since you and I were boys ; since the days when I, at least, devoured Maurice, Westcott, Erskine of Linlathen, George Macdonald, and half a score of others, and one's heart thrilled to their passionate defence of man's highest conception of God. In those days it was the liberal Churchman, whether liberal Catholic or Evangelical, who was a firm believer in a universal salvation ; to-day it is amongst the liberal Churchman one often finds a caveat lest our enthusiasm carry us too far. Take, for example, a recent address of Dean Inge's reported in "The Challenge," and I could give you many similar to it.

"He had no wish to ask them to think of the subterranean torture chambers of the Middle Ages, but the good-natured belief that every one would be saved if they gave God time enough was not to be found in the New Testament. There could be no firm belief in Heaven unless there was also a belief in final rejection whatever that might be. He did not want them to believe in tortures, but in finally losing that which God intended us to gain."

The crude doctrine of eternal damnation and the everlasting torture of souls has gone, thank God, for ever ; we have in its place a more scientific theory of life and the hereafter.

The real question, as I see it, is whether we are to discuss the final issue of human existence in terms of science or personality ; whether we are to see a process of evolution, checked often by failure to co-operate with environment ; and are to carry on our thoughts of this

same process, in studying man's spiritual nature, and its vast possibilities of failure or success ; or whether we are boldly to declare for the more alluring doctrine of a divine Father who has created spiritual beings to be the expression of His own love, and to win ultimate union with Himself ; whether in this case the resources are such that failure in the end is scarcely thinkable, and would seem in some sense, a reflection on the Creator Himself.

These are, I fancy, the two modern standpoints, both of which are worthy of respect. Under the banner of the latter are the great names of the pioneers I have spoken of, and their spiritual disciples to-day. Under the banner of science there is the self-determination of the finite will, however far that may go, and hence the possibility of failure which may indeed be final.

It is along such lines that Arden moves, and there are solemn words in the Bible to endorse his point of view. Perhaps it will never be possible to decide completely as between these two aspects. We dare not shrink from the possibility of utter failure, it is conceivable, but conceivable only, I think, on one condition, that God takes back the gift of life He has given, that He gives the soul Lethe's cup to drink. Either the universalist is true in his contention, or the Creator must withdraw into Himself the spark of life which guilty man has misused ; the shores of eternity cannot be strewn with the colossal failures of man's spiritual evolution.

I say this is conceivable ; we should not hesitate to face it, but if you ask do I believe it, frankly, Stephen, no !

We are starting it seems to me at the wrong angle

altogether, when we use the methods of science to interpret the purposes of God, rather than the psychology of personality as we know it. Are we to define God by scientific law, or by that which lies deepest in the soul of every man, and seems well-nigh ineradicable in the very worst of men—love? If the issue is really one between law and love, then, dear man, I firmly believe love will win the day.

In a passage in one of his essays Professor Pringle Pattison says :

“ The whole meaning of creation is seen to be the origination of conscious spirits : for to them alone God can reveal Himself and from them only can He obtain response. Everything else, the whole material fabric is but God’s medium as it were for the shaping of souls.”

Now, if this be true, are we to assume that the failures in the medium are accurate analogies of failure in the final purport, the soul of man? I think this is a crucial point. Does the scientific analogy really hold good? As I said to Arden, ‘ I trow not.’

In reality we are dealing with two opposite or contradictory ideas. One is a question of *method*, the other of *purpose*. Science has shown us marvellous vistas into the working of the divine method ; tracing back we are also able to look forward ; but science is really silent as to *purpose*. In studying method we may gather hints, but it is for the philosopher and theologian to find for us a purpose in the universe. Such a purpose is given us in the passage I have just quoted, and I find a still fuller interpretation in the words of Christ : “ My Father and your Father,” for I hold with all my heart God is not God if He can forego His own fatherhood.

It all depends, then, upon whether man’s finite will

can ultimately resist the resources of a Father's love : whether because we see the road to freedom on the lower planes of existence, strewn with the wreckage of faulty achievement, we are justified in assuming, therefore, that when God has evolved His final work the human spirit, that too is liable to the same laws of ultimate failure and disaster. We have seen sin and devilry enough in the past five years to shake the faith of any man, nevertheless to make this assumption is to say in other words, that the purpose of God and the love of God are eternally dependent on the finite will of His creature.

I cannot believe it, Stephen. I must accept the absolute invincible supremacy of the divine love. There may be differing degrees of evolution ; there may be differing possibilities of glory. It may be that had we never failed we should have reached further than we shall do through the fog of our failures ; yet even this is uncertain ; but that the love of the Fatherhood should be finally balked is to me unthinkable. We must choose whether we will build our faith on the character of God as revealed in the Cross of Christ, and by that which is highest in ourselves, or by the analogy of scientific and social evolution as we see it to-day. For myself I have chosen long since

XVI

DIVINE IMMANENCE

I ENTIRELY agree with you, my dear Stephen, that, from the point of view of the man in the street, the use of long technical words in religious addresses or works of popular theology is to be deprecated, though it is sometimes difficult to find the right substitute. Only the other day a friend of mine, a young doctor, was speaking about this very point : " When I take up a book and it talks of cosmic consciousness, immanence, and the like," he said, " I just feel I don't know what the man is driving at, and wish he would talk decent English." It would have been easy to retort that an article in the " Lancet " or " British Medical " is equally incomprehensible to myself ; but the point is we don't want our theology to be incomprehensible, and so far as possible we should simplify terms, or clearly define their meaning.

Speaking of the word immanence, which for us to-day is rather like " that blessed word Mesopotamia " of the old lady ; I read the other day in a Church Review that the real controversy in theology lay between immanentism (not my word, Stephen) and transcendence. I doubt it, I believe they are two half-truths of a great whole, which we dimly glimpse. If we are to reach a synthesis, it will be along the pathway of paradox, the

apparently contradictory and irreconcilable, blending to form a higher unity. And first of all, what do we really mean by the Immanence of God? I take it the term implies that God is no absentee landlord, standing apart from His universe in cold aloofness, but is Himself involved in the world process; that that process is in some sense an expression or utterance of His Being, and His divine potency is working through all that is.

It is very difficult to put big things simply, isn't it? We may jib at technicalities of language, but we find ourselves drifting into them. What I mean, however, is that the natural order of this world is a divine process, the unfolding of a big purpose, and that spirit is behind or immanent in what we call natural laws. This, I take it, is Theism as distinct from Deism. In the latter case the universe is mechanical, God moves and works upon it from without intervening from time to time to steady the machine; the final and great intervention being the Incarnation of His Son. In Christian Theism on the other hand, God works from within the process, and in the Incarnation we have at once, both the meaning, and the climax of the whole.

I imagine this is fairly clear, and I don't think such a doctrine of the divine working, which we technically call Immanence, in any way contravenes the transcendent personality and will of Almighty God; on the contrary, it expresses it most fully. The love which stoops is the great love of all, and the God within the process is grander far than the magnificent cold God wholly outside, but we will come to that directly. Meanwhile, there is another bogey of thought to face—Pantheism, all-God-ism, all that is, is God. Such a theory obliterates the differences between spirit and matter, good and evil, and does away

with every incitement to progress, it is essentially unmoral. The Pantheist, therefore, is the victim of a subtle and very dangerous optimism. Theoretically, he is content with the *status quo*, evil becomes an illusion, and his sense of moral values gradually eliminated. I cannot conceive how in a really Pantheistic world there could be any moral or social progress at all, but men are bigger than their theories.

Now, the difficulty about this theory of the inworking or immanent God is that, at first sight, it looks uncommonly like Pantheism, and the careless thinker easily confuses the issue by dropping into a semi-pantheistic attitude, depersonalising deity and destroying all will and moral distinctions. But to say that God is within His universe, and that the whole process of evolution is the utterance of His inherent will and purpose, is entirely different. It is one thing to declare that all that is, is *in* God, and He is livingly at work within the whole, but a very different thing to declare that the universe as we know and experience it, good and evil alike, is divine. The former thought is, after all, but a philosophical utterance of the Pauline gospel. "Of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things," and "In Him all things consist," whilst the latter simply leads to moral confusion.

It seems to me, indeed, that there is a kind of self-determination running through all nature, and hence whilst the divine Spirit is working within, the material on which it is working has a certain resisting element which may check, and does check, the powers of life all along the way. The denseness of matter, the individual tendencies of the animal—the lower instincts warring against the higher—these are part and parcel of the whole

process ; and yet if prolonged or intensified, they check progress and become evil. The evil is never of God, it is against such evil, the inherent spirit of life ever works. A thought like this explains to myself, or, at least, gives me a glimpse of light upon, the difficult problem that the process is at once divine, the work of the indwelling Spirit of God, and yet evil may be found within it. Here again we are up against a paradox, a paradox of the divine purpose, involving alike creation and redemption. Tell me if you see my point.

To go back, Orthodoxy, in its claim that Almighty God is essentially transcendent, stands behind the whole process, that is, is surely true, only His transcendence does not shut Him out of the process. There is no absentee landlord occasionally intervening in His universe. I think if we look at our own nature we discover what, at any rate, is an illustration of this. Man is part and parcel of the world in which he lives, he derives his powers, physical, mental and spiritual, through and from that universe. Nature has given him his body, his appetites, his consciousness. Society has given him his moral standards. Family life has given him most of his more tender traits. Unit as he is, he is derivative and in one sense but a highly organised nucleus of the whole ; yet as a man he stands alone in his conscious personality, a willing, loving, self-moving, being. Herein lies the paradox of his nature, a product of evolution, and yet an individual entity ; immanent, therefore, and at the same time transcendent.

Don't you think this brief summary of our own complex being helps to throw some real light back upon the divine ? I have pointed out before that it is not safe to argue from the human to the divine, but at least we

recognise in ourselves how it is possible to be at once the products of a process and yet to transcend that process altogether ; to be dependent upon it, and at the same time rule it. And we can perhaps think back Godwards thus far, and perceive that for Almighty God to be immanent in the whole process of evolution in no way contradicts the fact of His eternal transcendence. It is the immanence of One who is wholly causative, whose transcendence has willed to express itself through a mighty world process, unfolding on higher and ever higher planes, beginning with the amœba and ending with the Christ.

If we are to have any kind of consistent philosophy of life, it seems to me, it is on some such lines we shall discover it. The chain is just as strong as its weakest link, but maybe could we see all we should see that that hidden invisible link holds good. Thinkers of to-day, like Sir Henry Jones, Professor Pringle-Pattison and others, hold that we have no reason to conceive of a time when God was not expressing Himself in the universe. To be God is, to use another technical phrase, to be dynamic, to be active and self-uttering that is ; and the picture of eternity, modern philosophy gives, and which I incline to think St. Paul and St. John in their higher flights endorse, is of a God eternally expressing Himself, in a life-utterance or process. Science may call this expression evolution—Theology, revelation—the Mystic Seer, love—but it is one process, and it may extend or have extended through worlds and systems beyond number. The Word who is with and in the Father must ever be uttering Himself, He who transcends all must become immanent in all.

When we drop into our big phrases, Stephen, cosmic, static, dynamic, immanent and the like, we just mean these things. We are either Deists believing in a God who

stands apart from His universe and guides the helm from afar ; or Theists who believe that God is expressing Himself through all that is, working from within, ever seeking to eliminate the evil, which a certain permitted element of self-determination involves ; in short, expressing Himself in a universe, the clue to which is seen clearly defined on the Cross of Calvary, the world-symbol of unutterable, unquenchable, divine Love.

I sincerely hope this little excursion into the regions of philosophy has not bored you. It all came about through my attempt to justify the big words, of which you so rightly complain in your last. Tell me what you think of my thoughts, and don't hesitate to criticise freely.

XVII

GOD AND THE ABSOLUTE

It is very curious how often in our letters a remark of yours coincides with some train of thought of my own, or with something I have been reading. In the present instance it is the latter. You were speaking in your last of the Absolute of philosophy, and remark that you cannot see how it could be reconciled with the God and Father of Jesus Christ. The one is a cold negative perfection, the other a divinely human Being implicated in the well-being of His creatures: "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father." There certainly seems no common meeting-place between the two conceptions.

Now, strangely enough, I came across some striking thoughts on this very subject in Sir Henry Jones' "Gifford Lectures," which I have just read. They are the Swan Song of a profoundly religious thinker, and I feel that I can answer your letter the more readily for their perusal.

Very much I think hangs upon the question, what we mean by perfection. We usually associate the idea with a sense of changelessness, a perfect thing is that which is complete, finished, the very Latin word *perfectum* suggests this; and hence it is in a sense unchangeable,

nothing can be added to or taken from it, unless this be so, it is incomplete, imperfect. Now as we look at the universe around us the first thing which strikes us emphatically is its lack of completeness, imperfection is writ large on the very face of things. All along the line of evolution lie the flotsam and jetsam of apparent failure. In human life this is even more evident, and sin, sorrow, short-coming, are seen to dog the steps of the very best of men. True, this is only one aspect of the story, but so far as it goes it is a genuine one, and the world in which we live, however attractive in its wistful beauty, is yet ethically very far from perfect.

Consider now for just a moment, the ideal perfect world, which our minds conceive, what have we there? A world in which everyone is good, a world in which there are no failures of will or achievement, no parasites battenning on the toil of others, no hatred, lust or passion: how one's soul in her sadder moments cries out for such a world! And yet transplant oneself in idea into this world, and again what have we? We have, surely, the cessation of all moral progress and hence the possibility of infinite boredom; we have the adventure of the human soul checked and dammed in its advance. For think, Stephen, unless we feel we can go one better to-morrow, to-day's achievement becomes worthless, like the manna of the Israelites, stored up, it breeds worms; but if there lie before us the possibility of better, then again, to-day is good, but not yet perfect: you see, life is infinitely interesting because it involves progress, to-day's good is so good, because it is a stepping-stone to a better. The soul in its adventure becomes winged and buoyant because it forces itself against an atmosphere of resistance. As I understand it, then, you must have the

element of resistance or there can be no progress, and to stand still through eternity is the ultimate damnation. You remember Browning's "Star Repham" :

" No hope, no fear ; as to-day, shall be
To-morrow : advance or retreat need we
At our stand-still through eternity ? "

Hence, don't you think, so far as man and the universal order in which he lives is concerned, we must change our conception of perfection ? The perfect will no longer be for us the changeless and motionless ; it will be movement, adventure, love, which latter you remember is the past tense of the verb to live ; for energy which life really is, is ever moving, never static, always dynamic.

Now this looks very much at first sight as though one thought that the universe must always be imperfect, and that such imperfection is a necessary and permanent element in good. No one who clings to the final triumph of good can believe that, but he may as he studies his own soul and its needs come to readjust his conception of goodness ; he may, that is, realise that goodness itself is a process and has no finality ; its very glory lies in the fact that it is ever expressing itself more and more completely. The adventure of life, nay, the adventure of eternity itself, to my seeing, lies just in this fact that we shall go on from strength to strength, not from sin into goodness ; that, please God, we shall leave behind, but from one phase of strength and beauty into another phase of strength and beauty ; the infinite life, which itself spells ceaselessness, will ever be unfolding more and more of its beauty within as we are ripe for it. There is no finality, or if there be, no heaven for the yearning soul of man.

“ Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what s a heaven for ? ”

Either all our earthly values are false, or that is one of the absolute needs of the soul of man ; and as such cometh down from the Father of Lights Himself.

Let us now, greatly daring, apply this thought to the Person of God Himself. We often begin our theology by picturing to ourselves an ideal divine Being, and then we compare the actual with our mind-picture. We think what God must be, and then, e.g., compare Christ with our thought of God, and see how far He coincides therewith. The Jews did this and rejected Jesus. We still do so, and in practice too often reject the God whom Jesus saw and revealed to us. We don't consciously do this, yet when we come to rule our conduct of life, more often than not the Cross is foolishness to the Hellenism of our minds and a stumbling-block to our Judaistic pride, and hence we conceive of a God ultimately “ without body, parts or passions ” as our article says, the counterpart of the Absolute of philosophy.

But if Christianity be true we know nothing of God except what we see in Jesus Christ, hence we must define Godship in terms of what the Christ has shown us. We must begin with the known Jesus, and learn through Him of what kind is the unknown God—a God, mind you, Stephen, to be paradoxical, who can be known directly to each one of us by closest impact ; but whose lineaments have only been clearly revealed in the countenance of Jesus—and we shall see a Being of infinite love identifying Himself with the fate of mankind, and inbreathing Himself into their very lives ; for the God whom Jesus reveals is life, love, movement.

I cannot, perhaps, better compare this dynamic God which Jesus has shown us with the bloodless Absolute

of philosophy, than by giving you some telling words from Dr. Martineau.

“ God in Himself, as He was before ever a soul existed in his likeness, and while yet every precious thing was shut up within his unexpressed infinitude, may be the sort of impassive sublimity that some imagine, a place of mere intellectual space, where you vainly seek a surface on which any colour can be flung ; without love, without preference, without sorrow—a shadowless light equivalent to universal darkness. But,” he adds, “ God in the midst of a mixed universe, Lord of the eternal contest between good and ill, has an eye for every precious thing, mingles with every noble strife.”

Again, “ we naturally think of Him (God) as pre-existing whilst yet there was no universe, as filling a vacant eternity, and constituting an illimitable solitude ! Probably, no such time ever was ; and could we return into that perspective till we had left behind object after object and at last emptied the theatre of whatever now stands there, we should find instead of mere vacuity some predecessor in its place, still carrying us another stage away, till forced to own that the energy of God is co-eternal with its existence.”

No ; the vacant, impassive Absolute of the philosopher with its theological counterpart is, I take it, as much a fiction as the perfect universe of the idealist. Neither exists in reality, the latter would spell death to all moral and spiritual growth ; the former would give us a loveless God untouched by the feeling of our human infirmities, and—

“ . . . the living worm within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless God
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.”

Just as life in the universe means movement, growth, energy ; so we may reverently say, that life in the God-head also implies a like energy, and that God does not stand aloof from the universe but is ever expressing Himself in it, and eternity is just the infinite unfolding of God, His unlimited self-expression, all which potentially, and as it were in embryo, is contained within the God-head, eternally revealing its content ; no silent perfection, therefore, no aloof sovereign, but One through all eternity whose lineaments we have seen in the face of Christ.

You probably know Moffat's translation of St. John, 1, 4, " In Him life lay." I was walking the other day along the banks of one of the loveliest of our Devon rivers, overhead the first exquisite green of Spring hung in a veritable revelry of beauty ; that sentence kept haunting my thoughts—" In Him life lay." All the potentiality of this glory of the year's new birth ; in Him it lay to be unfolded in due time. And as I returned townwards in the little train, an old peasant with big childlike blue eyes, sat carrying a huge bunch of wild flowers, a true country posy, and as he stooped to bury his face in their scented petals, again the thought flashed—" In Him life lay "—the potentiality of this higher life, the child-heart, the soul of man, athirst for, and never to be completely satisfied with, the ultimate beauty of things.

And yet, Stephen, because " In Him we live, *move* and have our being " we believe there is ground for infinite contentment. Don't you feel this is true ?

XVIII

PETER PAN AND THE CRUCIFIX

I NEVER go up to Town without finding time for a brief visit to Frampton's inimitable statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. It has a message for my soul which it is not easy to translate into words, and yet it is something which I fancy others, too, are feeling. Hugh Walpole in his "Jeremy" in one delightful story in the "Thirteen Travellers," and again in the "Young Enchanted," voices it. I find it, too, beneath the whimsical humour of some of "Q.'s" stories, and even in parts and passages of his more serious writings; Alfred Noyes knows it and surely R. L. S. was at his best, the very incarnation of it.

To such as these the kingdom of the little child is no mere pretty conceit, it is tangible and real, they have themselves entered it. You will remember sending me Dr. Jacks' delightful essay on the lost radiance of the Christian religion, I have been wondering whether we might not also speak of the lost radiance of the true Hellenism, the Hellenism which has not become morbid and decadent, nor saddened by nemesis and the dread happenings of things: but is yet brave, adventurous, radiant, with laughter in its eyes and beauty in its heart. It is for this vision that I come to Kensington Gardens and I never fail to return strengthened and exhilarated.

I have been there this morning, the sun was shining full upon Frampton's bronze. Yesterday I stood in Westminster Cathedral before a finely-carved crucifix, sublime and awful symbol of the divine-human at its heights. Peter Pan and the Crucifix, Stephen ! At first sight they appear strangely incongruous : the natural lovable human boy, innocent and daring, unself-conscious, almost unmoral, lost in the delightful adventure of life, in contemplation of that world which is "so full of a number of things"—and Jesus the Man of Sorrows, the great refusal, the cup of agony, the uphill travail of the Cross. It seems as if there were no meeting-place between the two ; our souls sway one way or the other, first to the glad adventure of the child, then to the bruising uphill toil of the Cross. We are artists with the joyous irresponsibility of the Hellenist, or we are moralists with the sad experience of human loss and failure, but rarely are we both together, the one mood seems to exclude the other.

None the less, I take it, we are wrong, we somehow fail to do justice to life in its fullest meanings, and by life I mean essentially Christian life, for Christianity I hold is life at its truest and best. There is a clue somewhere and whenever I visit my Sanctum in Kensington Gardens I tell myself afresh, I will find it. Yes ! and there is the lost radiance. Dr. Jacks is assuredly right, and I have come to think that the atmosphere of that radiance is that of the kingdom of the little child ; it is the re-discovery of this kingdom we are hungering for, and in it we shall find, such is my dream, that the true spirit of Hellenism and the true spirit of Christianity are met together in a lovely synthesis.

Turn to the thoughts and words of Jesus Christ. It

is as little children we are to enter the Kingdom which He inaugurates ; it is the child who is the typical member ; it is the children whose angels always behold the face of our Father in Heaven ; it is a Child born in a manger and swathed in the swaddling clothes of tenderest infancy which, no less than the Cross, is the abiding symbol of Christianity. And mark you, Stephen, God can never become what He essentially is not. If the Child of Bethlehem were divine, and in Him the Word became flesh, it was because in the child-nature there is that which has a divine capacity—that which can truly represent the nature of God.

Is all this pure fantasy, or am I approaching a little nearer to my clue ? Granted what I have said is true, then the essential child has, as it were, a stabilising effect upon our minds, he gives poise and balance to the restless sway of our thoughts. I would like to believe this were so ; and we must remember, the child which Christ chose and set in the midst was not the anæmic, unreal, product of conventionally pious minds ; he was the sane, healthy, buoyant creature we all know, the representative child, unmarred by worldly aims and thoughts. To become a Christian was to become as such, and because we don't become such we have lost the radiance of the faith we profess.

Now, as I stand in front of Peter Pan, I ask myself wherein lies his charm, what is the message which bites into my soul and sends me home cheered and refreshed ? I believe, indeed, it is mainly his objectivity, the child is not interested in himself *quâ* self but in life, in the world, a world full of splendid adventure and delightful things. As regards himself he is synthetic rather than analytic, he does not want to think about his own feelings, he

wants to give his soul to what he sees, and to take into his soul what he sees. He may be greedy with a certain animal greed, but the typical child, my Peter Pan, and the child "in the midst" of the Christ, is just the keen adventurer in life, he is losing himself every moment therein, and he is drinking it in no less minute by minute. If I am right in my conception of the case, then he is at once an unconscious artist and an unconscious Christian. To the real artist, life means the giving of self to the beautiful; and to the real Christian, life means the giving of self to the beautiful in the region of the ideal, only in this latter case the ideal is a Person.

In each case it is objectivity, self-giving, which is as it were the central idea, and sooner or later for most of us the self-giving spells the Cross; Peter Pan takes us by the hand, gladly if we will let him, or sadly if we will not, up to the Cross—and beyond. "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross," thus was it written of the great Archetype of Peter Pan, as He climbed the hill of martyrdom; and "love, joy, peace" are foremost among the fruits of His spirit recorded by His great disciple. That Christians have known and felt this, except in some rare moment of illumination, may well be doubted, but none the less it may be true. We can see the world through the eyes of the child or the eyes of the saddened man, but the more we give ourselves to what is objective to self, the closer we come to the little child, the more of his buoyancy shall we know.

Sin, sorrow, and struggle, we are not going to escape, they are the giants to be fought in the great adventure, real enough to spoil many pages in the life-story, but not strong enough to daunt the spirit of the true Peter Pan; and the rest, the peevish, greedy children, who fain would

mar the gladness of our vision, are, I take it, to be treated with a certain tender forbearance ; they are children asleep, losing half the game of life ; that other Child said it was so : " They know not what they do "—" They are only dreaming silly dreams." We shall awake them, not so much, perhaps, by moral suasion as by the childlikeness of our own souls. It may be they, too, at length, will arise and climb to the Cross hand in hand with Peter Pan, and behold ! it is the hand of that other Child they are holding ; by grace of whose great life-adventure they and we alone can retain the spirit of unconquerable childhood.

I am afraid all this may very well sound to you exceedingly fanciful, and were I to send you many such letters you would quickly discount their value, yet I have the poets on my side and famous old Henry Vaughan to boot. Let me give you one quotation from him which, if you happen not to know, I fancy you will like :

" Were now, that chronicle alive,
Those white designs which children drive,
And the thoughts of each harmless hour,
With their consent too in my pow'r,
Quickly would I make my path ev'n,
And by mere playing go to Heaven."

There is a doctrine of original sin, Stephen, a very terrible and ugly one. It may be true, as the leaning tower of Pisa is true. But there is also a doctrine of original righteousness, which is no less true, as Jesus Christ knew, and as did Vaughan, Thomas Traherne, Wordsworth, and a score of others, to whom it has been given to see into the soul of a little child. And this in no way contravenes the Christian doctrine of redemption, it is rather part of the paradox which includes it.

EPILOGUE

MIRACLES AND LAW

You wonder, you say, my dear boy, whether some of my arguments are not too materialistic, whether I don't a little unduly jib at the word miracle. It may be you are indeed right ; as one grows older and sees how wonderful are the laws of Nature, one tends more and more to feel a certain impatience with the type of mind which is ever on the look-out for miraculous intervention, and is able to see the finger of God, mainly in the abnormal, and more rarely in the normal and every-day happenings.

If I have stressed the natural rather than the miraculous, it is because one grows to feel assured that such is the method of the divine action, and that we do honour to the self-consistency of God, if we believe He acts within the order He has laid down, rather than by sudden and miraculous breaches of that order from without. God forbid that I should deny the possibility of miracles. He may act in this way or that, but for myself it seems more like what I know of His doings, however faulty that knowledge be, to conceive of Him as acting along the channel of natural law, and which of us is to say where those laws end ?

There are many planes of law known to us to-day, and action from the vantage ground of the higher plane is well-nigh miraculous from the point of view of the lower,

e.g., the healing of disease by purely spiritual means is miraculous, as compared with the treatment by drug and hygiene, yet spiritual healing, no doubt, is demonstrable as law on its own plane. It is not the facts we fear so much as the wisdom of their interpretation. In the last resort the hunger for the miraculous is of a primitive and not very high order of things, it is akin to magic, and at some period of its history, perhaps every material law has been held miraculous by the superstitions and over credulous.

In reality those who suspect one of a naturalistic bias, do so because they assume that we think things happen naturally, by themselves so to speak ; but I cannot draw this distinction between the direct and indirect working of God, it seems to me unreal. If it be God's doing, it matters not whether it be mediated or unmediated ; and if I find as a matter of experience that His work is usually mediated, if all life—most sacramental of facts—goes to prove this, then I think I am not illogical in referring the apparently direct act to some law of mediation. You see, moreover, Stephen, things which happen naturally don't happen by themselves, it is the heresy of the miracle-monger to think so. I won't say he affirms this, but the trend of his thought leads that way ; nature is really to him a self-running machine, possibly a little godless, at any rate needing intervention from outside to readjust it.

Well, I reverence nature too greatly to believe this. I am not prepared to say with the idealist that she is in absolute harmony with the divine purpose ; on the contrary, there may be opposing factors which, so to speak, act as a check ; but it none the less remains to me undoubtedly true that God has willed to act through an order

which we call nature, and that that order is the channel He has laid down, wherein to evolve moral character and freedom, which nature no less than revelation declares to be the ultimate of the divine purpose. At least, such is my very limited reading of her runes, and in this sense nature is a personal and not impersonal order. Hence, I tend to look for God in His work, to see that work ever widening its area, ever lifting man into a vortex of divine activities and possibilities, where that which we call miracle is surely at home as a true child of the Father. In fine, those who agree with me and think on similar lines are at issue with such criticism as your suggestion implies : criticism, I take it, knowing as I do the trend of your mind, not on your part but rather as you imagine it in the minds of others : we are at issue, as I have already said, not on the question of facts, not whether these things happen, whether prayer avails, whether Christ is God incarnate, but in our interpretation of these facts. We have tried reverently to see them in the light of intuition and knowledge, and if we have failed, at least our failure is due to one cause, our deep-felt sense of the self-consistency of God, of an infinite Personality who has foreseen all the possibilities implicit in creation ; who is both immanent and transcendent, and whose transcendence is principally known through His immanence.

But have we failed after all, or will time justify our method ? Our conclusions, like many another result of man's thinking, may pass, leaving but dim prints on the sands of time, but if the method be a true one, then, dear friend, let us take heart and be glad—what matters our apparent failure, all will yet be well.

There is another point worthy of consideration which you omit, and which is often raised in discussing modern

thought, namely, its subjectivity. It is said and with some show of truth that we emphasise the subjective unduly, that our appeal is to experience, as distinct from objective factual truth.

Now this may well be so, and, by the way, I remember that you asked me in one of your letters if I were not getting too subjective. I think I failed at the time to answer the question, and will try and do so now. Perhaps more than ever men are asking to-day that truth shall be capable of verification, and in the last resort a truth of the spirit must verify itself in a spiritual experience. I imagine, as I have said previously, this is how the early Christians came to really *know*, as distinct from mere intellectual apprehension, the facts of the Incarnation and Resurrection, this spiritual reality was proven in a life process.

Take, for example, the former, it may indeed be true that Jesus told His disciples definitely that He was the Son of God. Granted this, what was the effect of that telling? It certainly did not buoy up their hearts through the crisis of the last great week in Jerusalem. It is one thing, you see, to be told fact, and another to recognise that fact and what it implies so that one can hold it as one's own. If we turn for a moment to that crucial story in the life of St. Peter, his confession of Christ, we observe, not that Christ declared Himself, but that He *drew forth* the declaration from Peter. The words, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," were a sure recognition of a great objective fact, but it came through the medium of conscious experience, and Jesus does not hesitate to say that that experience was divinely inspired of the Father.

Surely we have here the test of all genuine experience

of religious truth. We do not mean by experience that it begins and ends with the human, very far from it ; we mean rather that the divine impact on the human is so real that the objective fact is henceforth indubitable. All experience must be brought to the test of reality, it is something very far removed from mere emotionalism ; it assures us that what the Church declared as an objective fact has been recognised as such, and is held on grounds that may not be doubted, the only abiding foundation for a man's belief.

I think myself, Stephen, that the subjective voice of religious experience, and the objective voice of the Church's witness, should always act and react upon each other in a well-proportioned faith, and that the two are not divorced in practice but are part of one whole ; though I still hold the inner witness to be the senior partner. The external declaration began in St. Peter's case by being the voicing of an inner recognition, and it remains to each generation to recover for itself and reinterpret, the truth, in the crucible of experience.

I am conscious of having said much of this before, but the point is worth emphasising. The authority of objective truth is of real value, but it is that alone which we have made our own, which remains the unassailable possession of the soul. It is in the faith of one or more such truths, is it not, that each of us really lives, and that in death we hope to go forth undaunted to meet the great adventure of eternity ?





